CORONET

THERE ARE MANY KINDS OF LOVE SOME CAN CURE, ONE CAN

KILL...

Windows

H. B. GILMOUR

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'You Yell . . .
The Knife Goes Down
Your Throat.
Understand?'

She opened her eyes. A huge pitted face pressed close to hers. A face made up of grotesque unmatched features. Black eye hollows from which something – anger, fear, madness – glowed like icy coal. A nose that looked big and broken and badly repaired and wheezed threateningly. Flecks of spittle flew from the stranger's lips. Thick, wet lips that curled back to reveal large uneven teeth; teeth that looked like a decaying skeleton's teeth, bared, protruding in a death's head grin. His hair shone heavy with grease. His breath was hot and smelled oddly of decay and licorice . . . a sharp licorice smell that assailed her in a fetid, pungent mist. Sen-Sens. The man . . . the thing . . . that crushed her . . . was sucking breath mints.

PRICE 55p

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CORONET BOOKS
Hodder and Stoughton

Copyright © 1980 by United Artists Corporation

First published in the United States 1980
by Pocket Books

Coronet edition 1980

British Library C.I.P.
Gilmour, H B
Windows
I. Title II. Siege, Barry
823'.9'1F PS 3557.146/

ISBN 0-340-25541-2

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Printed and bound in Great Britain for Hodder and Stoughton Paperbacks, a division of Hodder and Stoughton Ltd., Mill Road, Dunton Green, Sevenoaks, Kent (Editorial Office: 47 Bedford Square, London, WC1 3DP) by Richard Clay (The Chaucer Press) Ltd, Bungay, Suffolk

For Keren and Michael with gratitude.
For Jessi and Claude with love.

WINDOWS

Chapter 1

The museum was quiet. It was almost dark and very still. All that remained of the day was a memory of children reflected in the vibrating neon of the People Tube. Emily walked through the tube on her way to the exit. She walked alongside the terraced ripple tanks that sang like a mountain stream inside the amazing tunnel. Her solitary footsteps echoed in the belly of the huge round drainage pipes glowing with looped rainbow spirals of neon. The neon buzzed softly; purred, she thought, much as a cat might settling to satisfied sleep after a vigorous day.

The children who stormed the museum, who clattered through the rainbow tunnel by day, were gone . . . home, eating dinner, doing homework, watching TV. The littlest ones were probably getting ready for bed. Emily loved the children and the museum. She felt an affection for the People Tube which afforded the kids such pleasure and, as she passed through the rings of colored neon, she patted the corrugated sides

of the structure as if to say, Well done, old girl. They're gone now. You can rest.

"Goodnight, Emily," someone called to her as she slipped her coat on and dug into her pockets for her gloves.

"Night," Emily called back softly. "Take care."

"See you tomorrow," another voice murmured in the early evening's stillness.

"Night, Millie."

Behind her, a new set of footsteps moved into the tunnel—noisy, rushing, awkward. Poor People Tube. No rest for the weary. She pulled on her gloves and turned to see who had entered the glowing tunnel.

"Aren't you leaving early?" The voice was authoritative, distinctively crisp, but the undercurrent of petulance in it identified the intruder even before Emily recognized the silhouetted figure rushing toward her.

"Goodnight, Steven," she said pleasantly, without slowing her pace.

"Wait," he called.

She buttoned her coat as he, bulky sheepskin jacket, briefcase, hat, gloves and scarf clutched clumsily to him, hurried to catch up with her. "What's the rush? It's early," he persisted.

"If anything, it's late."

He was beside her now. He shifted his load and tried to free a hand to hike up his glasses. It was a nervous gesture familiar to Emily. He pitched his head, tossing the strands of lank hair that had fallen across his eyes back up over his high forehead. He was young and balding, and he wore his sandy straight hair long to compensate for its thinness.

"Incidentally, Emily, I think the windmill is taking too much time from the tour so . . . "

Emily looked at her watch. "Steven." she said, continuing toward the exit without hesitation, "the windmill is fine."

"Well, I like the windmill, but . . ."

"Couldn't we talk about it tomorrow?"

"Emily, this is important," he said.

She kept walking. He shifted his briefcase, slung his scarf carelessly around his neck and tried to maneuver his jacket to a position from which he could slip into it while keeping abreast of her. He shoved his glasses back again and his pale eyes swam behind the thick lenses. "Why are you avoiding me?" he demanded.

"How can I avoid you? We work in the same place." Contrite with guilt, she stopped and waited for him. He ignored the concession.

"I am having difficulty with . . . " he began in the same peevish tone with which he'd accused her.

"Steven," she said softly but definitively. "We're getting a divorce."

His mouth worked silently for a second. He seemed not to remember just what it was he was having difficulty with. Then an angry little hiccup escaped him. He closed his lips, bit down on the inside of his mouth and, eyes full of hurt and defeat, stood watching her. She smiled apologetically and walked away.

Outside the Brooklyn Children's Museum it was dusk. A sky of blue shading to purple, striated with pink memories of the day, greeted her. The air was winter crisp. She thought of Steven and sighed, but not even his familiar petulance could rob her of the joy of the moment. The cold stung her nostrils and her dark, bright eyes. Goodnight, Steven; Goodbye, Steven, Emily said to herself. Then, as she hurried to the curb to hail a taxi, she laughed into the wind and, aloud this time, she said:

"Six sheiks with the sixth sheik's sixth sheep sick. Take that, world! Did you hear me, Steven? You made me feel rotten and guilty . . . like a bad girl again, Steven, poor Steven. But I didn't stutter! I—

selfish shellfish—didn't even—two rubber baby buggy bumpers—stutter!" Then she put two fingers in her mouth and whistled the way she usually did when she wanted to get the complete and awestruck attention of the children she worked with at the museum.

She whistled and laughed again. A passing cab responded to her call and she hid her silly grin as she opened the back door to climb in.

"Hi . . . " She studied the hack license posted on the taxi's dashboard before settling back behind the safety glass that separated her from Anthony Minolla, the driver. "Hi . . . Tony," she said. "Cranberry Street, please."

Chapter 2

He grunted and threw the meter flag down. He was thick in the face and through the shoulders. He wore a plaid wool cap with earlaps. A fat unlit cigar stub seemed permanently affixed to a corner of his grimly set lips.

"Do you know where Cranberry Street is?" Emily asked.

Minolla regarded her in the rearview mirror. "The Heights. Brooklyn Heights. You new in town?"

"Oh no, Tony. I'm a native New Yorker."

He shook his head skeptically. "You don't sound like it. And you don't look like it either."

Instinctively, Emily touched her short, black hair. It was thick and cut with almost geometric precision to frame her small pale face and to accent—or so the hairdresser had promised—her best feature: "Stunning," he had called them, "bold, dark eyes." Andrea, who wore her auburn hair fashionably tossled, had

laughed at the haircut. "Oh, honey, he's turned you into a hayseed Joan of Arc."

"Joan of Arc *was* a hayseed," Emily had told Andrea Glassen. "And besides, you were the one who recommended him. 'Oh, honey, he's terribly creative,' you said."

Andrea, whose dark-rimmed hazel eyes apparently needed no particular hairstyle to accent them, had been instantly contrite. She apologized, then insisted that Emily join her in a forgive-and-forget cup of coffee. That had been two weeks ago, outside Dr. Marin's office. Emily had declined because she'd had to hurry back to the museum. The next morning, Andrea Glassen, in a gray flannel jogging suit, had shown up at Emily's rented room on Cranberry Street carrying a pound of specially-blended coffee beans and a little electric grinder—all wrapped up in a red ribbon with a single rose stuck through it.

Emily had been surprised and touched. Since then, they'd breakfasted together almost daily. And Emily, shy, scared, stuttering Emily, seemed to have acquired a friend; her first since the separation from Steven. It added to her shaky, but growing, sense of confidence. However, she felt awkward about the relationship. Sometimes she wasn't sure whether it was Andrea she liked or the fact that someone as self-assured and sophisticated as Andrea had chosen to befriend her.

"Uh-uh, you don't look New York to me. Not Brooklyn anyways," Minolla decided.

Emily ran her fingers through her hair trying to fluff it up a bit. She wondered if it was the simple, not terribly fashionable, short, straight hair that had given her away. "No," she confessed, smiling. "Not Brooklyn. I'm an upstate New Yorker . . . near Poughkeepsie . . ."

He grinned and the cigar stub shook, nodded as if it were an independent being agreeing with him;

congratulating him on his expertise. "I knew it," Anthony Minolla said. "You ain't New York, New York. That I knew."

"Cabdrivers know everything," she said expansively. "I mean it. I love . . . I mean, I admire . . . cabdrivers. You know, I used to stutter." The *used to* registered, echoed in her mind and her smile broadened with fresh delight. "I still do sometimes," she amended happily. "But never with cabdrivers. I never stutter with cabdrivers or children . . . or my cat. I don't really know why."

"I got a cousin stutters. Terrible. Terrible," he intoned. "How'd you beat it?"

"Gosh, I'm not certain, you know. I've been seeing a . . . doctor. But the stuttering was almost gone when I started seeing him anyway. He's helped, I guess. At least . . . " She shrugged her thin shoulders and smiled. "*He* thinks he has."

"What kind of a doctor? A shrink?"

"Yes. A psychiatrist."

"What'd he do? He figure out why? What's he say about it?"

"He says, 'Um-hum' and 'Ahhh' and 'I see, Miss Hollender.' "

Tony Minolla laughed. "Shrinks," he said. "What a crock!"

"He said it; I didn't, Dr. Marin," Emily whispered.

"What?"

"I agree."

"So you quit him, right?"

"Uh . . . wrong."

"How come? I mean, what're you wasting your money on a shrink for? Hey, you could pay me, you know. I could use the money better than him."

"So could I, believe me, Tony."

"So quit him."

"Who knows," Emily said. "I just might."

"Good girl."

Dusk had darkened to night as Emily climbed from the cab. At the curb, clasping the collar of her cloth coat tightly, she waved a farewell to Tony. The wind swept a tiny tornado of debris around her ankles. She waited until the taxi's tail-lights disappeared in the distance, then she extricated herself from the torn piece of newspaper and whirling candy and gum wrappers and walked toward the little store down the street.

Hicks Bros. Groceries, the gilt legend on the windows read. But it was Ira's Deli to Emily. The red neon Miller's Beer sign was aglow in the darkened store. Emily peered through the front door, past the "Open" sign that had been turned to read "Closed." She rapped on the glass and, a moment later, a sliver of light from the back room widened to illuminate the cluttered aisles. Ira Katz's diminutive form stretched in a sinister shadow toward her. As he approached, she could see that he was already wearing a scarf and street jacket over his old shopkeeper's apron. It was a long, white cotton apron that reached almost to his ankles and billowed as he shuffled to the door. He had his cap on, too. But in one hand he held the brown paper bag that Emily knew carried her morning's rolls.

"Sorry, Ira," she said when he had unlocked the door.

"You almost missed me." He shrugged and smiled and handed her the bag of rolls.

"Almost," she said. "Thanks." She paid him and turned to leave.

"See you tomorrow," he said. Then shut the door and double-locked it. The sound of the shooting bolt echoed in the dark deserted street. Emily trembled unexpectedly and clutched the little brown bag tight against her as she crossed toward home.

An icy gust of wind caught her, slapped her cheeks sharply and tore through her hair. Her footsteps and the keening of the wind as it swooped through the bare branches of the trees and stirred a new swirl of debris along the curb were the only noises in the night.

Emily hurried across the street. Before she climbed the steps of the old brownstone in which she lived she looked both ways, studying the street. Shadows swayed in the doorways of buildings and reached scrawny arms from the trees at the curb. But nothing human stirred. No traffic moved along the narrow block.

At the top of the stairs she removed her gloves so that she could rummage for her keys more efficiently. The only available light came from a street lamp that winked behind the dancing skeleton trees. Even the bay window that jutted out to the right of the front door was dark, its shades drawn out tightly. Her hands were cold and clammy she noticed. With her gloves on she hadn't felt the cold or the moisture beading in her palms. She found her keys and rubbed her hands along the sides of her coat and scolded herself for the strange case of nerves that suddenly seemed to have afflicted her. Grow up, Dorothy, we're not in Kansas anymore, she chided herself.

And then her hands started to shake. Ever so slightly, but enough for the key to make little clicking sounds against the metal doorplate when she tried to fit it into the lock. Scaredy cat, Emily. Shivering, quivering, stuttering fool. What are you afraid of? Who's going to jump from the shadows to shout boo at you? Who's going to come creeping up behind you? She was angry at herself and, angrily, she scanned the street again from her vantage point at the top of the stoop. Nothing. No one. Then, illuminated by the greenish glowing streetlamp, she thought she saw the hood

of a yellow cab parked and poking out of the side street a block away. She sighed, then, and smiled, accepting the sight as an omen of good fortune. Where there was a cab, there was a cabdriver. And where there was a cabdriver, Emily was safe.

She pushed the key into the lock, turned it, and entered the building. Her mail was laid out on the ornate mahogany table in the vestibule. Junk mail, bills, and one pale blue envelope with the signature "A. Glassen" embossed in a navy flourish across the sealed flap. She tucked the unstamped note from Andrea—which probably just said, "See you at breakfast" or "Sorry, can't make it tomorrów"—into her pocket along with the rest of the mail, then climbed the narrow flight of stairs to her furnished room. Her *temporary* furnished room, she reminded herself.

She listened for Jenny as she unlocked her door. When she heard no welcoming mew, no scratching, no comforting presence of the calico cat behind the door, her heart began to thud idiotically. She could feel her palms moisten again.

Emily Hollender, stop it, she commanded. You're a big girl now. You decided to go out into the wonderful wide world alone and, nevermind that old worldly-wise Andrea is always warning you of the dangers lurking 'round every bend and old worry-wart Steven doesn't expect you to survive a night without him, and the sage and silent Dr. Marin doubts your ability to cope without his occasional condescending grunts of approval. . . .

Emily opened the door. "Hi, Jenny," she called softly into the darkness. She stepped into the room. You're a big girl now, Emily, she reminded herself again as she reached for the light switch. And then the shadow she'd been waiting for all her life moved suddenly from behind the door. The calloused hand her thudding heart had warned her of clamped like

a leather muzzle across her mouth. There was no Jenny. There was no light. Only a hulking hard-breathing wall of flesh that threw her onto the floor and straddled and smothered her with thighs that pressed thick and heavy against her body.

"You yell . . . the knife goes down your throat. Understand?"

She opened her eyes. A huge pitted face pressed close to hers. A face made up of grotesque unmatched features. Black eye hollows from which something—anger, fear, madness—glowed like icy coal. A nose that looked big and broken and badly repaired and wheezed threateningly. Flecks of spittle flew from the stranger's lips. Thick, wet lips that curled back to reveal large uneven teeth; teeth that looked like a decaying skeleton's teeth, bared, protruding in a death's head grin. His hair shone heavy with grease. His breath was hot and smelled oddly of decay and licorice . . . a sharp licorice smell that assailed her in a fetid, pungent mist. Sen-Sens. The man . . . the thing . . . that crushed her . . . was sucking on breath mints.

She knew what the click was before she saw the knife glint between them. Still, the sound of the switchblade opening set her shivering anew. He held it over her face, the tip pointed at her brow, the shaft parallel with her nose. He pulled her head back by the hair, and then he slid the knife down her face, over her nose and lips and chin and held it to her throat.

"I want to hear you say, 'Yeah, I understand,'" he hissed.

Emily knew before she opened her mouth that her tongue was thick and useless. She groaned helplessly. The man shifted his weight on top of her. He held the knife with one hand and, with the other, he began to toy with a small contraption that he'd taken from his pocket and laid down on the floor beside

her head. She couldn't see it. She couldn't turn her head. But he leaned over and rasped into her ear, "Okay. I'm going to start it now. And you talk. You talk good and hot, sweetheart. You make a hot tape for me, you understand? Now say it. . . ." He pressed a button on the little machine that Emily now realized was a tape recorder. "You say, 'I understand!' "

"Y-yes," she managed. "I un-d-d-du . . . "

He'd begun to massage himself. He was rubbing himself against her and his thighs chafed under her opened coat and pushed her skirt higher with each thrust. "Speak up! I can't hear you!"

"Y-yes, I-I un-d-der-s-stand."

"You got underwear on? Huh?"

Emily bit her lip and sobbed. She felt the knife blade scratch her throat. "D-don't h-hurt mm-me . . . " Speak, Emily. You've got to speak. You've got to speak to live!

"What you got on? Top and bottom. What?"

"P-please . . . "

"Show it. Come on, lift the sweater."

"I-I c-can't."

His lips curled back again. His eyes, the icy glowing hollows, widened then frowned angrily. "You crazy? Sure you can. You better!" He lurched forward shoving his groin hard against her. Her legs opened involuntarily and he let her hair go, let her head thump to the floor while he grabbed at the inside of her thigh. He pinched the thigh taking her flesh into his fist. "Lift it!"

Her eyes were suddenly blinded with tears. Sobbing, shaking, she lifted her sweater up over her bra.

"It's skin color . . . ah . . . see-through like . . . " He was narrating for the tape-recorder. With the knife, he sliced through each of her bra straps. "Now

let's look at the good stuff. . . . Pull it down! Sweetheart."

She couldn't. She didn't.

"Hey!" he shouted, twisting the fistful of flesh until her legs jerked crazily.

"N-n-noooo," she howled. "Noooo . . ."

He frowned again. Again his lips curled back to reveal the decaying grin, the stinking, wheezing breath that not even the licorice flavored Sen-Sens could obscure. Then, he lifted the knife above her face and lowered it slowly, inserted it slowly, into her mouth. "Pull it down!"

Emily's fingers found her bra and, shaking, moved it, tore it, tugged it down.

"Oh yeah," the man crooned, "Oh yeah . . . Now open your mouth . . ."

She did. Her lips which had been holding the knife blade opened and she gagged.

"Say ahhh . . . Ahhhhhh . . ." He pressed the knife down onto her tongue as a doctor would. "Ahhhhhh . . ." he coaxed her.

"A-a-ahh-ahh!!!" She was choking and shivering. Her nose and eyes filled with tears. She felt the switchblade against her tongue. She felt her throat fill and something, water or blood, begin to well up and finally overflow her mouth. She was drooling and gagging and he kept pushing the knife down her throat.

"You move—I'll cut," he warned. Then he began to fumble with his clothing. He leaned his face up against hers. "Now. It's now, sweetheart. And you'd better make it sound like I am making you cream . . ."

Chapter 3

Andrea Glassen was a creature of habit. Each morning she slipped into one of her three identical gray flannel jogging suits, donned her woolen knit cap and walked from her elegant home in the Heights to a fixed point approximately halfway across the Brooklyn Bridge. Then, after an appropriate period of warming-up exercises, she jogged back across the bridge, through Cadman Plaza Park, south toward the promenade and home. Recently, however, she'd added to her regimen. The addition was breakfast at Emily Hollender's apartment.

Andrea enjoyed the ritual aspects of her morning run almost as much as the jogging itself. In that way —and in few others, thank God—she was like her father, the late, great shipbuilder-philanthropist, Jules Glassen. Or "Daddy Warbucks" as *The Brooklyn Eagle* and *The Daily News* used to call him. Oh, yes, Jules had been a creature of habit, as well; a man of rigid principles.

The only human being on earth who could make Julie bend without breaking—or so old family friends had confided to Andrea—was her exquisitely beautiful mother, Eleanora "Honey" Glassen. When Honey died, they used to say, she took the best of Julie with her. Andrea agreed. She'd hardly known her mother. She was barely six years old when she'd been forced to stand beside her governess in stunned silence to watch as the earth swallowed the gleaming mahogany box in which, she'd been told, her Honey-Mommy was sleeping.

What was left of Jules Glassen after his young wife's death was a fiercely determined automaton. Something like a machine, a jackhammer, Andrea often thought; a thing that moved mechanically not humanly; that could shatter concrete and feel nothing. Worse. A man who *wanted* to be a machine. Who *wanted* not to think or feel or remember or love. His daughter, whose honey-colored hair and hazel eyes were too painful a reminder of her mother, Julie decided to ignore . . . but not before he'd tried, one grieving night soon after the funeral, to turn her into Eleanora. After that, the giving part of his life was carefully channeled into a number of tax dodges labeled foundations. Thus, with the aid of an efficient team of accountants and public relations men, did he earn his philanthropic reputation.

Rigid principles and healthy habits. Andrea trotted along the walkway high above the river, remembering. Behind her, the island of Manhattan woke to a crisp day, its towers stretching out of the pink dawn toward a wintry blue sky. Before her lay the weathered piers, the leafless trees and tarnished grandeur, the dwarfed gray silhouette of Brooklyn, her father's kingdom. Jules had been a runner, too. A runner and swimmer and an aggressively competitive handball player. In fact, he was well into his sixties when he died of a

stroke on the court. He died in Brooklyn, of course. Bred and dead, born and buried, a king in his kingdom forever.

Andrea drew a long breath and headed down the ramp leading to Cadman Plaza. Her father had tried to forget her but she would not forget him. No. She wanted to think and feel and remember! She wanted to love. And, to her wholehearted joy, she thought that she had finally found someone on whom to lavish the tenderness, affection and, yes, even the money, that had been hoarded, wasted, for the more than thirty years since her mother had died.

Andrea stopped. She stood with her hands on her hips, panting, waiting for the traffic on the avenue to slow down so that she could cross. She stood sweating and panting and smiling. This week had been one of the most important of her life. It was a time of discovery and commitment, decision and action. She'd hinted at it in her note to Emily, but now she hesitated, wondering if she oughtn't savour the excitement alone a while longer. Or perhaps reveal it to Dr. Marin first.

The traffic light changed and she jogged across the roadway leading to the bridge and up the little hill toward Cranberry Street. She slowed suddenly and smiled. My God, she thought, I owe it all to you, father. If you hadn't made it a condition of my inheritance that I go into therapy . . . Well, this might never have happened. Thank you, father. For dying. Because your death, it seems, may have helped me to find love. But she didn't really feel grateful to him. Not to Jules Glassen. And despite dear Dr. Marin's best efforts, she guessed she probably never would.

She continued up the hill, then turned the corner and stopped abruptly. A police cruiser was double-parked in front of Emily Hollender's building. As it began to pull away, Andrea noticed a second car,

a deep green Chrysler, sitting with its wheels half-on, half-off the curb. Its grill was pointing at the stoop of number three Cranberry Street. She waited for a moment. She watched the black and white cruiser move toward the corner. Then she ran past the front grill of the oddly tilted Chrysler and up the stoop. The street door was open. She dashed inside without ringing Emily's bell. She took the stairs two at a time.

She had lost her pace. Her breathing was off. Her heart was pounding too fast. She knocked on Emily's door and tried to regulate her breathing again. She gulped air. "Emily," she called. Her voice quivered slightly. "Emily, it's Andrea."

A man opened the door.

"Who are you?" she demanded. "I'm looking for Emily."

"Luffrono," the man replied. "I'm a police officer."

Andrea pushed past him. He had a sense of dark hair and deep-set eyes and a shabby coat that was opened and a dark scarf that hung carelessly from his collar. He was young and tall and he let her by easily then shut the door behind her. She spun at the sound of the door closing. She stared up at Luffrono. He was smiling grimly at her. He was holding a book in his hand. From the sleeping alcove at the far end of the room, she heard a woman's voice but it was not Emily's.

"What's going on? Where's Emily?" Andrea turned toward the alcove. "Emily?" she called. There was a woman sitting on Emily's bed. She saw the woman's back. Her hair was blonde and shoulder length. It was too neat. Too cute-looking. Sprayed stiff.

"Just try to tell us . . . " the blonde was saying, " . . . anything . . . in your own words . . . You know, Emily, if he's done this kind of thing before . . . "

Andrea sighed with relief. The woman was talking to Emily. Emily was alive.

"You're a friend, are you . . . Miss . . . ?" The police officer moved quietly to her side.

"Glassen. Yes, I am. What's happening here?"

He looked at the title of the book he was holding, then slipped it back onto one of the wooden planks resting on cinderblocks that made up Emily's bookshelf. The books' spine read: "Stuttering, The Enigma." It fit in the space between "Stammering and Its Cure" and "Behaviorism and the Treatment of Stuttering."

"Someone broke in here last night," he said softly. "She was assaulted."

" . . . Anything you can remember about the incident . . . " the blonde on the bed urged in a voice syrupy with condescension.

Incident. The word infuriated Andrea. She moved toward the sleeping alcove and the blonde turned to face her.

"Vicki," Luffrono said, "this is a friend of Miss Hollender's. Miss Glassen—Sergeant Lavaco."

The blonde stood up. Behind her Emily stared out at the room. Her small, dark head was framed against the alcove window. Her eyes looked dark and dead.

"Why don't you sit down, Miss Glassen. Sometimes a friend can help make these things easier," Vicki Lavaco suggested. Her face was as overdone as her hair; as bright as Emily's was ashen. Andrea glared at the woman. Luffrono touched Andrea's elbow, encouraging. She pulled away from him skittishly, angrily.

Vicki Lavaco shrugged and turned back to Emily. "It's been ten or twelve hours now, Emily. The person who did this . . . "

"Just give her a chance," Andrea said, crossing quickly to Emily's side. "She used to have difficulty . . . "

"No," Emily murmured, "I can s-speak for m-myself." She wrapped her arms around herself and

shook her head apologetically at Andrea who had extended a hand toward her. I t-told you," she whispered to the policewoman, "he forced his way in . . . I couldn't see . . . He was . . . v-very cruel. He f-forced me to . . . " She gave up.

"Miss Hollender," Luffrono stepped between Andrea and Emily. "I know you're at a disadvantage here. And I know it won't be easy for you to give us a description or describe what he did."

"You're making her nervous," Andrea said.

"Would you like to try and write it down?" Luffrono continued. "It might be easier."

Emily hugged herself harder. Her knuckles were white.

"He'll be real hard to catch unless you can help me. . . . "

"You are," Andrea insisted. "You're making her nervous."

" . . . unless you can help me . . . understand."

"It's alright, Emily. Everything will be alright."

Luffrono glanced at Andrea. Then turned back to Emily. "I don't want this to happen to anyone else. . . . We need some small detail, a piece of clothing, his voice, his face . . . " He took a card from his pocket and put it on the window sill. "When you can, just call this number or come by, and I'll be there . . . to listen to you. Okay?"

Emily looked concerned. She seemed about to urge him to stay. Her mouth opened and Luffrono waited but she was unable to speak. He guessed she was afraid to stutter again. Still, he waited.

"What's wrong with you people?" Andrea protested. "Can't you see . . . "

Luffrono turned to Vicki. "Okay. We'd better go now."

The blonde nodded. She smiled sadly at Emily, then took her coat from the bed and followed Luffrono

to the door. "You know," she said impulsively, just after he'd gone, "he's a good cop, Bob. He really cares what happens to people."

Emily turned back to the window, defeated. Andrea crossed the room briskly to see the blonde Sergeant out. Behind the door, half-under the wall, molding, lay the pale blue envelope she'd left in the vestibule yesterday. It contained a poem she'd written. A poem about love. This was no time for Emily to find it, Andrea thought bitterly . . . not after what she'd just been through. She slipped the envelope into the pocket of her jogging jacket and double-locked the door.

Emily was still staring out the alcove window. The room was chilly and too still. Andrea had never liked it. For that matter, neither had Emily, she reminded herself. Of course, she'd done the best she could with someone else's shabby furnishings, but no amount of colorful touches—a crocheted afghan tossed over the lumpy sofa back, prints and picture postcards tacked to the walls, a ceramic pot filled with autumn dried flowers—nothing could obscure the deep-down transient nature of the place.

"Emily?" There was no response. Andrea sighed and cleared her throat. "You don't have to tell them anything you know," she said softly. She had a normally husky voice. It resonated in the hopeless silence.

At the base of the single step that set the entryway apart from the rest of the room, she found one of Emily's gloves. She stared at it for a moment trying to envision the assault, the "incident" as Sergeant Vicki Lavaco had so delicately described it. Andrea's patrician nostrils flared in renewed outrage. Her cheeks colored as she scanned the area where the glove lay. Was it here he had taken her? Had he dragged her to the bed? She wiped a sudden flush of

sweat from her forehead and bent to pick up the glove. Impulsively, she held it against her as if by cradling the lost little glove she could express her concern and caring for its owner. Then, brusquely, she strode to the kitchen.

The coffee bean grinder she'd given to Emily sat on a shelf above the inadequate counter space. Andrea checked the refrigerator and the cupboards but couldn't find any fresh beans. There was a can of ready-mixed coffee, however. She filled the kettle and set it on the stove and began to hunt for the filter papers. Her hands were shaking slightly. Nevertheless, it was time to speak her mind.

"Emily," she called. She tried to make her tone light; light and pleasant and casual. "Hon, I've been thinking, and really, after what happened . . . "

"Andrea?" The sound of Emily's voice, soft, broken, touched her profoundly. Like a whisper of wind, Andrea thought. She set the box of filters down and clasped her hands together to stop them from shaking. "You shouldn't stay here alone," she said finally. "Emily, after what happened, I think it would be best . . . "

"Andrea?"

"Yes?"

"I'm sorry . . . but w-would you . . . please . . . l-leave now."

Andrea shut her eyes. Her clasped knuckles tightened. It's alright, she told herself. Remember, you're hypersensitive to rejection. Dr. Marin said so. And considering life with father, it's no wonder. You've every right to be. Stop shaking, Andrea. Stop shaking! Emily needs you.

She tried to smile. "Well . . . if you like."

"I have to w-w-work th-this out."

She turned off the flame under the kettle and stood resting her head against the cupboard door. "Em-

ily . . . Look, we haven't known each other very long, but I can help you, hon. Be smart. Stay at my place tonight."

"Well, I appreciate it, Andrea. I r-really do b-but I have to handle it m-myself."

Andrea walked to the alcove. Emily was still standing at the window. The police officer's card was in her hand. Her hand looked very pale and fragile. Andrea's own hands, she knew, were raw and weathered from her morning run. She'd have to remember to wear gloves now that it was so awfully cold. She'd have to share her secret with Emily another time. Someday, perhaps, she'd even be able to tell her about . . . about why she was in therapy with Dr. Marin. About Jules. And Honey. And about being little and frightened and all alone in a house with only a big, angry man . . . My God, Andrea thought. She already knows about that; she knows now.

"You don't want to be alone . . . "

Emily shook her head. "I'm alright. I-I'll be fine, Andrea. An-and I'm n-not . . . " She couldn't finish the sentence, but she smiled and pointed toward the floor.

Andrea looked down. A pair of mottled white and orange paws peeked out from under the bed. Emily's cat. "Jenny?" she shook her head and laughed. "Okay. It's not a good idea, but I do understand. Listen. I'm free tonight. You remember that, all right? Maybe we can have dinner." She sighed and walked to the door. "I'll call you later," she promised, and left.

Emily stared at the door. "Jenny," she called. The cat mewed softly, then rolled over and began to play with a corner of the blanket that hung within her reach. "Want to walk me to the door?" Emily asked. Jennifer ignored her. "Some pal." Emily glanced from

the cat to the door again. "Okay. Suit yourself. We'll handle this without you."

When she said it, she hadn't any idea of who "we" was. But her hand closed around the card the police officer had left her. She glanced at it now. Detective Robert Luffrono. 12th Precinct. The address was not far from Cranberry Street. "Okay, Jenny," Emily told the cat who paused, a claw stuck in the blanket, to watch her as she made her way slowly across the room. "Bob and I will lock up."

She did, remembering with despair that she hadn't double-locked the door yesterday morning. Never mind, she thought. Luffrono had said the lock had been picked; that both locks could have been picked fairly easily. But Sergeant Lavaco said the man needed only a credit card to enter. Emily latched the door chain, as well, then crossed to the bathroom.

She rinsed her face with cold water. She was still unable to look at herself in the mirror. She had washed her face and hands several times and taken a shower with the curtain pulled back some time after the man left. She had taken the shower after dialing the police emergency number twice and finding herself unable to do anything but cry into the phone. She hadn't been able to get a single word out. Not one. It was almost more terrifying than the . . . assault. Than the rape.

She dabbed at her face and neck with the cool washcloth. She held the washcloth over her eyes and spoke into it. "Rape," she said. "I have been raped. He was very cruel. He f-forced m-me t-t-to . . . " She stopped and, still carrying the damp cloth, returned to the living room. She went directly to the table on which her tape recorder was set up. With force of will so firm that her hands obeyed her, dared not tremble, she picked up a cassette, inserted it into the machine and pressed Start.

"A selfish shellfish," the announcer on the tape said crisply.

From the moment the man . . . the rapist . . . had started up the tiny pocket machine he'd carried, the moment she'd heard the mechanical whirring and heard him order her to talk, somewhere in the back of her mind, she'd wondered whether she would ever use her own tape recorder again. She stared at it now. "A selfish shellfish," she said, and allowed herself a sigh of relief.

"Two rubber baby buggy bumpers," the announcer recited.

"Two rubber baby buggy bumpers," Emily responded.

She prepared Jennifer's food while she repeated the recorded speech exercises. "Three Swiss wristwatches . . . Four thick thistle sticks . . ." She set the red bowl down and sat beside it on the entryway step. "Six sheiks with the sixth sheik's sixth sheep sick."

Jenny came across the room. She sniffed at her food but didn't eat it. Emily lifted the cat gently onto her lap and Jenny began to purr. Cradling her tenderly, Emily whispered, "I'm stuttering again, Jenny." Then she held the little creature up and looked at her. "But we'll beat it, right? You don't mind a little setback, do you?"

Chapter 4

Bridge Towers was an enormous apartment complex in lower Manhattan. Millie, one of the secretaries at the museum, had mentioned it to Emily some time ago. Nearly everyone at the museum knew now that Emily and Steven had separated, but Millie had been among the first. When Emily gave her the Cranberry Street address, Millie had seemed disappointed. "Why Brooklyn, for heaven's sake? I was sure you'd make it across the bridge . . . " Millie hadn't, but Manhattan was the promised land to her.

She had a friend who had escaped the enslavement of living at home on Ocean Parkway for a magical month or two before she'd married a Brooklyn boy and been dragged back across the river. Millie's friend, Emily remembered, had found happiness, security and a terrific view of the bridge during her memorable exodus.

Now, sitting in the back of Manual Navarro's taxi, the name of the Manhattan housing development

came back to Emily. She'd already looked at and rejected two apartments in Brooklyn: one in the Heights; one closer to the museum.

"Manhattan, Manny," she instructed the young driver. "Bridge Towers. It's just across the Brooklyn Bridge . . . lower Manhattan . . . somewhere near City Hall, I guess."

"Pearl Street," he said.

"Oh, you know it. What's it like?"

"Big. It's very, very big. Lot a buildins. Couple a trees. Looks pretty . . . like a big birthday cake."

He'd pointed it out to her from the Brooklyn side of the bridge. It did look like a cake, she thought, like a layer cake, sitting a bit to the north of the World Trade Towers. When Navarro pulled up in front of the complex, Emily saw that what had looked like stripes of filling were lines of little balconies. The buildings were brick and clean and much taller than they'd seemed compared to the twin Towers.

She found the building manager's office by following a series of printed signs. And, to her delight, the manager's unctuous assistant told her that she was "one lucky little lady." There was an apartment that had just become available in one of the buildings. Just one, among the hundreds of desirable, fully-rented, well-maintained, pet-free apartments on the premises. Of course, there was a waiting list, but as Emily was here . . . with identification and a check . . . well . . . One lucky lady, yes indeed.

With a flourish, he marked three X's on the rental contract and slid it across his desk at her. He held out the pen he'd used, but Emily didn't take it. "I'd like to r-read it f-first," she said.

He held the keys to the apartment in his left hand, conspicuously, tantalizingly. With an enormous sigh of condescension, he began to tap them impatiently on the desk. "You want to read? Look, I don't have

any trouble renting these . . . and you realize how lucky you are to catch one available . . . ? Or don't you agree?"

She capitulated, instantly. She hadn't the words or the will to do otherwise. She signed the lease where the assistant building manager had marked the X's and handed the contract back to him. And, bullied and childish as she felt, an enormous weight lifted from her. She had managed, in one day, to find the apartment she'd promised herself for months. Not a furnished room, but her own apartment, in a beautiful high rise overlooking the bridge and the Brooklyn skyline. A safe elevator building with hundreds of neighbors and no narrow wooden stairs to climb alone at night. Across the river from . . . him . . . a sick sadist . . . a . . . She grit her teeth and closed her mouth tightly. Her jaw had begun to tremble and her tongue was thickening helplessly.

"And now we'll need a check."

"Oh!" she said. "I-I'm . . . I'm s-sorry." She rummaged in her purse for her checkbook while he waited and watched her with undisguised curiosity, watched her mouth as if he expected to see her begin frothing. She blushed deeply. I'm not sorry, she thought. Why should I be sorry. Why do I say I'm sorry when I'm not!

She wrote out the check quickly, ignoring him as he spelled the name of the real estate corporation for her. She handed the check to him and held out her hand for the keys. But he was in no hurry now. He scrutinized the check. "Remember," he said, finally, "no pets. No dogs, no cats."

"I told you," Emily said clearly and crisply. "I detest animals."

She clutched the keys all the way back to Brooklyn. She held them so tightly that they left red marks in her palm. The new apartment was almost twice as ex-

pensive as her furnished room. During the cab ride back to Cranberry Street, she began trying to figure out how she might cut expenses. She was in the cheaper cat food and instant coffee department of her mind when she remembered her conversation with Anthony Minolla, the cabdriver whose cousin stuttered. She smiled suddenly. Then she sighed. The simplest solution was no more Dr. Marin.

Great, she thought sarcastically, and what do I tell him? Listen, doc, I met this cabdriver who convinced me that I'm wasting my money on you . . . And then I met this rapist who convinced me that I'd better move . . . And, all things being equal, I simply can't afford you anymore. Adios, my silver-haired shrinko. Oh, and if the loss of my $50 per session cuts too deeply into your finances, try giving up your manicures and Sulka ties and Gucci belts.

Emily felt giddy, and just a little guilty about her sudden burst of bitchiness. Marin was all right. But there was something a bit too slick, too condescending about him. He'd never believe that she could cope without making her weekly confession to him. He was the head of the Church of Painful Progress and she was a poor sinner expected to attain salvation by dropping a weekly tithe into his collection basket.

Andrea seemed to like him. Well, Andrea could afford to like him. Hell, Emily thought, Andrea could probably afford to buy him. She wondered suddenly whether her own relationship with Andrea would suffer without Dr. Marin forming a common bond between them. They'd met less than a month ago in his waiting room. Two fidgety ladies-in-waiting leafing through magazines—*Smithsonian* for Emily; *Holiday* for Andrea. God, Emily thought, even his magazines were expensive!

The taxi pulled up to the Brooklyn brownstone and she tipped the driver, Henry Rappaport, who she'd

made the mistake of calling Hank. Rappaport had blinked at her in the rearview mirror. "Hank? Hank? Since when did you ever know a Rappaport who would call himself Hank? Hank is a name for a piece of bacon. Henny, that's me. Henny is already gefilte fish!" Emily had laughed and apologized. Now Henny Rappaport wished her well—plenty of *mazel* with the new apartment. Even though it was still bright daylight, he waited at the curb until she was safely inside the front door, then he drove away.

She heard the telephone ringing inside the apartment as she turned the key in the second lock. Steven, she thought. She hadn't phoned the museum. Perhaps it was Andrea. By the time she got inside, the ringing had stopped. She looked around the furnished room. It was all she could do to keep from shouting, Goodbye! Instead, she scrambled under the bed for Jenny, caught, lifted and hugged the little cat.

"Hey, guess what? We're going to blow this dump!" Emily told her. "That's right. And you're going with me. Of course, you'll have to lay low for a while. But we'll smuggle you in. Don't you worry, Jennifer. How-so-ever, my love, until I work it out, I've got to leave you here. . . ."

Jenny meowed on cue, a mew of protest. "Now, now," Emily urged, "trust me. It's just for tonight. I'm going to pack a couple of essentials and drag them over to our brand new shiny bright home now. And, tomorrow, I'll be back for you—Scout's honor, Jenny. Oh, you're going to love it. Wait and see!"

Chapter 5

"Just keep the change, Jim," Emily told James R. Kowalowitz as she scrambled out of his cab and onto the curb in front of Bridge Towers.

"You sure you don't want help with that box?" the happy young long-haired driver asked.

It was dusk. The warm yellow lights of the lobby were already turned on, a welcoming beacon in the icy evening. The sound of traffic from the bridge traveled on the wind to her. The sound of the river, blocks away, was indistinguishable from the whish of the wind and the home-going cars.

Emily lugged the large cardboard box she'd gotten from Ira Katz out of Kowalowitz's backseat. "Thanks, Jim. I can handle it myself. Goodnight now."

He laughed and, like a conjurer, produced a thinly rolled cigarette from somewhere inside his hair. It must have been lodged behind his ear. "Want a toke?"

Emily was heaving the heavy carton onto the curb. "Uh, thanks, no."

"Okay. Good luck."

She caught her breath as the cab drove off. Then she dragged the box to the entrance of the building, up the single step, through the double glass doors, through the securely-locked front door and down the tiled hallway toward the elevator. It wasn't a long wait. The elevator was empty when it arrived; Emily could be certain of that because the security mirrors fastened to the upper corners gave a clear view of the whole car. No one was inside. No one could hide in an elevator with mirrors that let you see, before you got inside, just what awaited you once the doors were closed.

She smiled with satisfaction. She stood on her tiptoes and looked at her smiling face in the round corner mirrors. And then the doors opened on the sixth floor and Emily flushed with embarrassment because two children were staring at her and, for a moment, she imagined that they had been able to see through the doors and had caught her grinning at herself.

"Hi," she said, dragging the box out of the elevator.

There was a woman with the children. "Greg, Lorraine . . . get out of the way," she told them. Greg, who appeared to be six or seven years old, stuck his tongue out at his mother.

"Ma," the boy's older sister whined, "Ma, Greg just stuck his tongue out at you."

"Excuse me," Emily said, "but could you tell me . . .

"You're going to get it, Gregory Weingast. Wait until your father comes home." The woman ushered the children onto the elevator.

"Why does he have to wait till daddy comes home?" Lorraine wanted to know. "Why don't you hit him now?"

"Do you know where 6G is?" Emily called as the elevator doors began to close.

"Around the corner," Mrs. Weingast shouted. "Lorraine, you get that finger out of your nose!"

Emily pulled the box around the corner of the corridor and up to her apartment door. She took the keys from her coat pocket, unlocked the door, and dragged the heavy carton inside.

Huge windows framed a spectacular view of the Brooklyn Bridge. Across the river, the piers of the Navy Yard and the old warehouses along the waterfront glowed pink with the reflection of the setting sun. Emily whirled around. The room, freshly painted white, bare and full of echoes, was also alive with fast-fading sunlight. "Oh," she breathed, "Wow." She crossed to the window and stood, hands pressed against the glass, staring out at the magical world. She stood like a child lit by carnival lights, her wide black eyes moist with excitement, her pale face luminous and encircled by the reflection of the bridge.

After a time, she began to unpack. She'd plugged in the little Woolworth's lamp she'd brought and taken out her rolled sleeping bag and the container of food that Ira had fixed for her. When she got to her telephone index, a plastic rectangular case with a metal dial that ran along the alphabetized edge, she suddenly remembered that she had a call to make. She took her keys with her and ventured out into the corridor again.

She rang the doorbell across the way.

"Who is it?" a terse female voice responded.

"Hi . . . It's your new neighbor . . . from 6G . . . "

"Yes?" the voice was impatient and unmoved by Emily's cheery attempt at friendliness.

"I was wondering . . . because my phone isn't in yet . . . "

"Sam!" the woman behind the door shouted, ignoring and interrupting Emily. "A girl wants to use the telephone. She must have moved into Evelyn's apart-

ment." A moment later, Emily heard the safety chain rattling. The door opened and an elderly woman with short, slightly wild red hair stared at her over the rims of her bi-focals. "Come in," she said in the same flat, no-nonsense tone.

Emily glanced quickly at the name plate under the bell. Marx, it read. "Thank you, Mrs. Marx," she said, and entered the apartment.

"Ida," the redhead corrected her. "It's over there."

Emily walked to the phone while the woman stared at her. She dialed the museum and as the number rang, she smiled at Ida and, sniffing appreciatively, said, "Ummm . . . what is that wonderful smell?"

"The dishwasher," Ida Marx said. "Why? It bothers you?"

A pipe-smoking, balding man appeared at the doorway to the kitchen. Unnerved by Ida, Emily merely smiled quietly at him.

"This is a recording. You have reached the executive offices of Brooklyn Children's Museum. The offices are closed at the moment, but . . . " A mechanical click interrupted the telephone message. "Hello . . . "

"Steven?" Emily said, gratefully.

"Emily . . . ? I was just working late. We're adding a piece of equipment over here . . . "

She listened charitably but impatiently as he launched into a description of the new addition. Finally, he interrupted his own monologue to say, "What happened, by the way? You weren't at work today. I called but . . . "

Ida and Sam Marx were watching Emily with mild interest but full attention.

"Steven, I can't talk right now. Something came up . . . and I need your help. . . . "

"Really?" He sounded pleased.

"I have to move. Right away. Tomorrow morning."

"What about work?" he asked, switching quickly to his nagging, self-important tone.

Ida and Sam were still staring. Ida's bird-like head was tilted now. Her hair looked like a disheveled nest. She glanced from Emily to Sam, raised her eyebrows and lowered the corners of her mouth in a grimace of curiosity, then turned her small glittery eyes back to Emily. Sam puffed and watched.

"Steven," Emily said in a lower voice, tight, embarrassed under the Marx's scrutiny. "I need your help."

"I don't know," he said.

"Steven, you could drive over . . . or send one of the guys in a car."

He must finally have acknowledged the urgency in her voice. Certainly Ida and Sam seemed aware of it.

"Well, okay. Yeah," Steven said grudgingly. "I'll send someone over."

"Great."

"What time?"

"How's eight o'clock?"

"If I can."

She had to get off the phone. The Marxes were staring at her and Steven's tone had become increasingly clipped and distant. Emily was beginning to feel helpless again. And when she felt helpless she stuttered. "Thanks a million, Steven." She reminded herself that she was not helpless; that she was in the apartment of complete strangers in a new building miles from Brooklyn and that what she'd done today took guts. "Really, thanks," she said.

"Okay . . . " He waited. "Well, okay. Bye."

Emily hung up quickly.

"You know, young lady . . . " Sam pointed his pipe stem in her direction. "There is a telephone in the lobby. . . . "

"I'm terribly sorry. I didn't realize."

"Don't be sorry," Ida said. "You didn't know."

Emily was grateful but flustered. I always say sorry, she was tempted to tell Ida. I've been a walking apology for most of my life. Instead, she looked from Ida to Sam and back. "Right. Thanks again," she told them and hurried to the door.

"You're welcome," Ida called. They watched her go, then glanced at one another. Sam shrugged silently. "Nervous," Ida said.

"Congratulations. With Evelyn gone, I wondered who you would have to worry about."

Ida raised her eyebrows and shrugged. "Congratulations to you. So you're right. So I enjoy worrying. Sue me." She swept some imaginary dust from around the lace doilie on top of the television console. "And don't you worry, Sam. As long as I've got you, I've got enough to worry about."

Back in her own apartment, Emily unrolled her sleeping bag and sat down, cross-legged, on it. The tape recorder was plugged into the same socket as the Woolworth's lamp. She switched off the lamp and sat in the fading light, staring at the picture window. She thought about Steven and his disappointment in her. He'd tried so hard to take care of her. That was the problem, Emily knew. And she still hadn't found a way to explain it to him.

He'd wanted to take care of her; he'd wanted her to take care of him. She was tired of both. She wanted each of them to take care of themselves. Poor, pale Steven . . . forever trying to negotiate a two-mommy marriage. How could she make Steven understand that there was an important difference between caring about someone and taking care of them? He still couldn't believe, *wouldn't* believe, that she hadn't left him for another man.

For me, Steven. I left you for me. I want to take care of myself. I'm oh so tired of shaking and quaking

and stuttering my way through this perilous world against which you and Andrea and Dr. Marin constantly caution me. I'm tired of being afraid of, and protected from, life—good, bad, happy, miserable, lovely and dangerous life. Oh yes, you were right. You *are* right. It is dangerous. I know that now. But look at me. The worst that could happen has happened and I'm still alive . . . and happy, she thought. Oh God, yes, I really am happy. I'm scared. I still stutter. I want to cringe when people stare at me . . . even two harmless old things like Ida and Sam Marx. . . . But I am alive and well and taking care of myself. And that is more than anyone, especially you, Steven, ever expected of me.

She hit the button on the tape machine and began to recite after the announcer: "A selfish shellfish . . . Two rubber baby buggy bumpers . . . Three Swiss wristwatches . . . " To be honest, I guess, it's more than I expected of me, too, she thought.

Then, oddly, as the tensions of the day turned into a deep and undeniable weariness, Steven's sad, defeated face was replaced in her mind by Detective Luffrono's concerned but confident beauty. Beauty? What an odd word, Emily mused as the tape droned on. He's not beautiful, really. Rugged, attractive, handsome, any of the masculine cliches would be more accurate. His features were large and uneven and craggy, but he carried himself with an easy competence that was . . . well, graceful. Graceful? Oh, go to sleep, Emily. Beautiful, graceful—really!

"Four thick thistle sticks . . . Five buckets of blue bats' and black bugs' blood . . . "

Even when Andrea was trying to help her, trying to protect her from his questions, Emily had sensed that Detective Luffrono believed in her competence. He hadn't babied her. He'd been kind and gentle, but without condescension.

"Six sheiks with the sick . . . with the sixth sheik's sixth sheep . . . six sheiks with the sixth sheik's sixth sheep sick!"

Emily pressed the Off button. The room was quiet now, and dark. It was time to sleep. But first, she rummaged in her purse until her fingers found the card Luffrono had given to her. *He's a good cop, Bob. He really cares what happens to people.* Holding on to the card, she snuggled into her sleeping bag. Holding on to the card, she felt safe.

Chapter 6

The cab was parked on a darkened street not very far from Emily's old apartment. The driver took the miniature tape recorder from his jacket pocket and handed it through the opened safety glass to the passenger in the backseat. Then he hunted in the same pocket for the little bag of Sen-Sens he always carried. There weren't many places left you could get them. A couple of candy stores in Brooklyn that he knew of. Nowhere else.

He tossed two of the little black dots into his mouth and felt the bittersweet licorice flavor melt on his tongue. He covered his mouth with his gloved hand and blew into it. He liked how quickly the breath mints dissolved; how nice they smelled. He smiled. From the backseat, he heard the tape playing. The girl was gagging.

"You move—I cut. Uh, say ah. *Say ahhhh.*"

He hadn't expected her to be so cute. He liked the way her hair felt. Clean. It smelled nice, too. She

smelled nice. At first she'd been all icy cold from being outside. When he'd grabbed her thigh, it had been cool. When he held onto it, when he, like, pinched her . . . then it'd gotten warmer.

"Ahhh. P-please . . . "

"You got underwear on? Huh, sweets?"

"D-don't hurt mme-me . . . "

He wished he had another copy of that tape. What a jerk. He could have made two while he was at it.

"Show it. C'mon! Lift the sweater, sweets . . . "

"I-I can't . . . "

The driver shook his head. "D'ja hear that? 'I can't,' she says. 'I-I can't' . . . " He looked in the rear-view mirror. She had her head back. Her head was resting on the seat back. Her eyes were shut but her mouth was moving. It looked as if she was saying, Ahhhh. He wondered how she would feel if he took his knife out now. Maybe he *could* make another tape. He could shove the knife into *her* mouth right now and make her tell him what she was wearing.

"You crazy? Sure you . . . "

No. He needed the money more. Besides, this one was different from the scared one with the big dark eyes. This one *was* crazy.

"I gotta go," he told her. "You heard enough now? I gotta go. I shouldn't even be around here."

She switched off the tape recorder and, without a word, she took the packet of bills from her purse and put it into his waiting hand. She rewound the tape while he counted the money.

"Okay. It's all here. You ever need another job like that, you call me, huh? I'm good, ain't I? You could tell from what you heard, couldn't you?"

She stared at him through the safety glass. She had cat's eyes; spooky greenish-yellow eyes. They glared at him. Her thin lips curled into a smile. It was a weird smile, too. She definitely made him nervous.

"Okay. I gotta get going now. You got what you wanted, didn't you?"

She put the recorder into her purse. She put her hand on the door handle. It rankled him that she wouldn't speak to him. Crazy cunt like that. Did she think she was too good for him? Weird bitch. "Hey," he called to her. He knew it would freak her. "I should pay you, you know? She was hot. I had a ball. In fact, maybe I'll do it again . . . just for the hell of it." He started to laugh.

She opened the door. Her voice was deep for a woman, but there was nothing sexy about it. "Don't," she said. It was like the thud of a drum, the way she said it. Don't. Boom. She got out and slammed the door.

He wanted to laugh. She was watching him. He wanted to show her that he wasn't afraid of her. He wanted to laugh, but he couldn't. His mouth was all dried up. He spilled a few more Sen-Sens onto his tongue and started to suck on them. They didn't melt so easy this time, that's how dry his mouth had gotten. Don't, she'd said. Sick bitch. He turned the motor on and gunned it, then he drove away.

Chapter 7

The green Chrysler swung through the narrow streets of the Heights. "Swid," Bob Luffrono said to the sandy-haired detective at the wheel, "hang a right at the top of this hill, okay?"

Jim Swid turned the wheel and scanned the street. It was early. Nothing stirring up here, just one old man in a coat and a long apron hauling cartons of groceries up out of his cellar. "You want me to stop over there? You want coffee or something?"

Luffrono glanced over at Hicks Bros. Grocery. "No. Turn again at Cranberry, up there. Number three."

"Right." Swid double-parked in front of the address. Luffrono sat in the car for a minute staring up at the bay window. It was dark. He rubbed his hands together for warmth. "Maybe, we should have gotten a coffee back there at the deli." The curtain in the window stirred. Bob Luffrono smiled and ran his hands through his unruly hair. "Be back in a minute. I want to check on someone."

"The girl who got raped . . . ?" When Luffrono, half out of the car, turned to stare questioningly at him, Jim Swid shrugged his shoulders and grinned. "I'm a detective," he said. "You want me to go get a pack of cigarettes for a couple of minutes? Or that coffee?"

"What else did Vicki tell you?"

"Who, Lavaco? What makes you think Lavaco told me anything?"

"I'm a detective." Luffrono looked up at the window again. The girl's cat was sitting on the sill now, staring down at the street. "Milk, no sugar."

"Right. She said she was your type. I said, 'Oh yeah? What's that make her, invisible?' "

"You're a riot, Jimmy. Honest."

"So what are you checking on her for?"

Luffrono shrugged. "I guess she's my type." He got out of the car.

"That Lavaco." Swid laughed. "She is some detective." He watched Luffrono start up the outside stairs, then he pulled a tight U-turn and headed back toward Hicks Bros. for the coffee.

The street door was unlatched. Jesus. Luffrono shook his head. He rubbed his hands together again and looked from the top of the stoop toward the river. He couldn't see it, of course. But he could see the bridge and a little bit of the New York skyline. It was still gray out. Just a slice of red was running behind the bottom of the buildings on the Manhattan side, but some of the windows looked as if they were on fire.

He hated mornings. Hated getting up in the morning. But he liked this part of the day. It reminded him of staying up all night studying for exams; reminded him of his couple of years at Fordham. Staying up all night, then walking around the campus at daybreak just to clear his head, get the blood flowing in his legs again.

Next September, he promised himself. In the fall,

I'll go back. I'm not too old for law school yet. He turned the collar of his coat up. His nose was red. His eyes stung from the cold. Sure, he told himself, two more years at Fordham, then law school . . . Beans! Who're you kidding, Luffrono? MaryAnne Colleccio—MaryAnne Mandel now, he corrected himself—she'd finished up a couple of years ago. His mother'd told him that MaryAnne was with a big law firm in the city. His mother was still sore that he'd blown it with The Collecch, that he hadn't married MaryAnne. The only thing he had going for him as far as his mother was concerned was that MaryAnne had been married to Arte Mandel for two whole years now and no baby. His mother was almost more sore about that than about his blowing it. What kind of a girl is that—two years already, no babies?

Luffrono watched Swid turn the corner heading for the little grocery store they'd passed. MaryAnne Colleccio had had long blonde hair and big blue eyes. Emily Hollender had short dark hair and big black eyes. That pleased him. He didn't like to think he had "a type." He pushed through the street door and walked up the single narrow flight to her apartment.

He knocked, waited, knocked again. Nothing. Luffrono checked his watch. "Miss Hollender? It's Bob Luffrono, from the 12th precinct," he called, and rapped on the door one last time. Then he fished out his wallet and took one of his cards from it. He took out his ballpoint pen and clicked it. The point slipped back. It took a few more clicks to get it to stick. The curtains moving in the window? Must have been the cat . . . There was a scratching at the door, then a perfectly timed meow. Luffrono shook his head and grinned. What a detective. Great.

Call me, okay? he wrote on the card. He stuck it into the door right next to the buzzer and put his pen away.

So where is she, Sherlock? Staying with friends, probably. And with that goddamn door downstairs wide open, it was a good thing, too. Not that rapists usually struck twice. Although he had heard of it happening. A young waitress, he remembered, a college kid waiting tables in a bar—she'd been hit three times by the same guy on her way home from work. Three times before she'd had the guts to even report it. They never found the creep, of course. And the kid dropped out permanently.

Luffrono hurried down the stairs. Swid wasn't back yet. He sat down on the bottom step of the stoop and wrapped his woolen scarf tighter and pulled at the collar of his coat again. It looked like snow. It smelled like snow. He glanced up at the gray sky overhead. It would be snowing by three, he predicted. And she was probably still asleep, safe and warm somewhere. . . .

Glassen. He reached around to his back pocket. His fingers brushed the leather of his holster and he checked it mindlessly, making sure the flap was closed before he pulled the pad out of his back pocket. He flipped through a few pages. Yes, the name was there. Andrea Glassen. No address though. Too bad. Too bad, what? he asked himself, annoyed now. What're you going to do, track her down? For what? What if she is sleeping at that Glassen's place? You going to join them for breakfast, Luffrono?

Swid pulled up and Luffrono stood and stretched and walked over to the car.

"Sugar, no milk," Jim said.

Luffrono shook his head. "Wrong."

"Get in."

Luffrono did. "She wasn't there."

"Probably with her family or something. Would you hang around after a thing like that?"

"She's got no family in the city . . . An ex-husband . . ." He frowned suddenly. "Naw, she's

probably at a friend's, don't you think? She's got this very protective friend . . . Andrea Glassen . . . She showed up yesterday while we were there. She's probably over at her place."

Swid raised his eyebrows. "Probably," he said.

"Why, you think maybe she'd go back to her ex? Or maybe she's got a boyfriend, who knows . . . ?"

"Beats me."

Luffrono laughed. "What's the matter, aren't you a detective?" He opened the coffee container and took a sip. "Sugar?" He spit the mouthful back. "Hey, Jimmy, you know sugar can kill you. Really. It's terrible for you."

Jim Swid pulled a pair of sunglasses from the overhead visor and slipped them on against the dawn glare. "Ever hear of a cop dying of sugar?" he asked.

The taxi Emily had taken from Manhattan pulled up to the brownstone on Cranberry Street about ten minutes later. "Oh, and a doorman," Emily was telling Ben, the driver. "I didn't even know that when I signed the lease. I didn't see him last night either, but he saw me. He'd been helping someone at the other elevator bank. He introduced himself this morning."

"A doorman, too? Sounds like you got yourself a deal all right." She paid him and he wished her good luck. "Need some help with those?"

She pulled the folded packing boxes out of the cab. "I can manage, thanks. Bye, Ben."

She watched as he drove away. Then she turned toward the building. How small and ugly it looked. And she had chosen it once, above two or three other places where she might have lived. She had chosen it because she loved Brooklyn Heights and its small, distinctive brownstones and renovated town houses. It had reminded her of a little village then. It still did. But winter had stripped it of the foliage, the carefully cultivated flowers and green hedges that added so much

to its warmth and charm. Winter had stripped away the leaves, the color, even patches of paint from the facades of buildings. Ruthless and raw, winter had stripped it of its safety.

She dashed up the steps, then noticed that the downstairs door was open. With some trepidation she entered the hallway and, slowly, climbed the stairs to her apartment. She saw Luffrono's card, took it, heard Jenny crying behind the door and hurried to get inside. The radiator hissed and the pipe beside it clanked familiarly enough, but the apartment seemed as violated as she'd been. She scooped Jenny up into her arms and cradled her. . . . She stood for some time like that, her back against the door, the cat in her arms. She stood remembering. Finally, the phone rang and she moved to answer it.

"Hello?" Emily put Jennifer down and turned on the light above the table.

"Emily . . . " It was Steven. He sounded nervously assertive.

"What's the matter, Steven?"

"Emily, you'd better come to work."

"What?"

"I have a staff to think about and the new exhibit to arrange and . . . "

"My God," she said. Her shoulders slumped. "No one's coming, right?"

There was a knock at the door. Emily looked toward it quickly. The bottom lock worked automatically. She hadn't latched the top, though. Nor threaded the metal safety chain.

"I just can't go sending people all over."

There was another knock.

"Nevermind, it's my fault. Good-bye, Steven." She hung up. My fault. There, she'd done it again. Excuse me. Pardon me. I'm sorry. My fault. She walked gingerly to the door. Rapists don't knock, you fool,

she told herself. Still her heart was thudding stupidly.

"Who is it . . . ?" God, she sounded like a child. A victim!

"It's me, Andrea. . . ."

Her sigh of relief was audible. "Andrea, hi." Emily opened the door. Andrea, her forehead moist from her morning run, cheeks wind-flushed, a mauve cowl-necked sweater peeping from her zippered jogging jacket, stood in the hallway. Her worry-creased brow opened brightly the moment she saw Emily's face. Then it closed down again, concerned, cautious:

"I called last night. Are you all right?"

Emily nodded and motioned for Andrea to come in. "I'm moving," she said, stepping back into the room.

"Oh . . . where?"

"Across the river . . . on Pearl Street . . . Bridge Towers. It's got a doorman, a view, clean paint . . . " She was at the table again, trying to unknot the rope that held the folded cartons together.

Andrea followed her. "Here, let me do it . . . Shouldn't you think this out . . . ?"

"I h-have," Emily said. Andrea was working on the knot. Emily walked to the bookshelves to get the scissors she kept in the woven straw basket there.

Andrea turned away from the cartons, let them drop to the floor. "No," she said. "If you won't stay with me, I'll come over here."

She couldn't find the basket. She crossed to the second set of shelves. "I can't live here a-a-a-anymore. It's . . . " Damn, Emily thought. Take a deep breath. Breathe before you speak. It's Andrea; only Andrea. But there was no way to find the words; no words to describe why she had to move. "I can't, that's all," she said at last. "Besides, I signed a lease."

Andrea paced to the window and back. She thrust her hands into the paunch pocket of her flannel sweat-suit. "Have you told Steven what happened?"

Emily looked up. "What for?" She heard the annoyance in her voice. "I'm sorry," she said automatically. "He . . . I told him that I'm moving. He was supposed to send someone by to help me this morning. He just phoned . . . " She shook her head. "It seems I don't choose men very well."

Andrea propped herself against the table and crossed her arms. Her hazel eyes studied Emily closely. "No, huh . . . ?"

"Well, I . . . " Emily let the sentence and the thought trail. What was she going to say to someone as attractive, rich *and* articulate as Andrea Glassen—that girls who stutter don't have much choice to begin with? No, Emily decided firmly. That was the old victim speaking. That was poor Emily, helpless Emily.

But Andrea pressed. "What does your shrink say about it?"

My shrink? Emily thought. Our shrink, Andrea. The one you seem so enamoured of; old sexy, silver-haired Doc Marin. "He says, 'Hmmmm, what do you think?' . . . Watch it Jenny," she said, lifting the cat and moving her away from the bookcase. Then she snapped her fingers, remembering. The scissors. She'd taken them to the museum last week by mistake, carried them in a bag full of Origami paper she'd been fooling with. She hadn't brought them back.

"You ought to hang him, honey," Andrea said. Her tone was perfectly serious. "You need a friend."

"But . . . you're going. You see him, too."

Andrea's eyes flashed angrily, but her lips smiled. It wasn't a pleasant smile. Her thin lips curled contemptuously. She pulled a cigarette from the pack tucked away in her pocket. Her fingers were shaking, Emily noticed. Her hands were chapped from the cold. Andrea lit the cigarette and blew a plume of smoke toward the ceiling.

"It's a condition of my annuity—my father, that

bastard—" She waved the smoke away. "I've got to. Oh, very complicated. But, as with all else, there *are* compensations. . . ."

"Well, I've never been comfortable with Dr. Marin. Anyway, it doesn't matter. From here on, my money goes for rent."

"Money? I can lend you all the money you need."

"Thanks," Emily said, genuinely touched. "But . . . no . . . " She managed to unknot the boxes. She folded one now and carried it into the bathroom. She opened the medicine chest and studied its sparse contents. While she was about it, she decided that a couple of aspirin couldn't hurt. She took two with some water from the tap, then proceeded to empty the slightly rusted shelves of the cabinet.

"Emily . . . "

"Yes?" she called. Her door buzzer sounded; then someone began to knock at the door. The pounding was heavy and loud and no amount of scolding could quiet her nerves this time. She caught a bottle of perfume as it clattered against the enamel sink. The glass bottle hadn't broken, but her hands began to perspire as she set it down on the basin's edge. She wiped her palms against her hips and left the bathroom.

More knocking. Andrea was at the bookshelf. She'd apparently been browsing through some of the paperbacks. Her eyes were fastened on the door now.

"Who is it?" Emily called out. There was no answer. The buzzer sounded again and the knocking continued. Andrea shrugged in response to Emily's questioning gaze. "Hello . . ." Emily shouted, crossing to the door. "Jesus, what's the matter?" The noise had her rattled. She looked over her shoulder at Andrea, then released the top bolt, leaving the door chain attached.

"Listen," she began, "I . . . "

A hand shot through the opening between the door

and chain. A man's hand, huge fingers grappling claw-like, jutted from a filthy frayed cuff and caught her. Torn nails seized her blouse, pulled her toward the door, ripping the fabric as if it were tissue paper. The sweating hand smelled of licorice.

"It's him! IT'S HIM!" With all her strength Emily leaned back into the room; resisted being pulled closer to the door. She was screaming. The chain looked horribly fragile; the hand hideously strong.

Suddenly another hand grabbed her. Andrea, wild-eyed, her teeth bared like an animal, threw herself against the door. She looked even more terrified than Emily. With the full strength of her athlete's body, she smashed into the hard wood. There was a hideous sound; a sound of splintering and a deafening scream as Andrea tugged at Emily.

The claw-like grip opened, spasmed empty and frantic. The hand, the arm, was wedged in the door. The door hadn't splintered. The man's arm had.

In the single moment it took for Andrea to tear Emily free and send her reeling toward the safety of the bathroom, the door opened enough for the howling man to try to withdraw his arm. Andrea smashed the door shut again, this time catching the man's retreating fingers.

Emily ran blindly for the bathroom. Cowering inside, she heard the second crunch and another howl, a roar of agony. Then the man must finally have pulled free of the door. She heard his footsteps down the stairs and the door slamming cleanly shut. It was over. The only sounds left were the sound of her own heart, of Andrea's exhausted breathing as she slumped against the door, and the radiator hissing and clanking crazily.

It seemed like a long time. It was only a minute later when Andrea, her eyes still wide, wild as a cat's, joined Emily. "He's gone," she whispered. Her pecul-

iar deep voice was soft and soothing and she took Emily into her arms. Tenderly, she stroked her dark hair and the soft nape of her neck. She rested her handsome cheekbone against Emily's face; soft as flannel, Andrea's cheekbone caressed her, moved along her trembling face and pressed, finally, against the vein that pumped from her brow down into the warmth of her neck. Andrea's lips burrowed there, delicately. Her thin lips felt the heat and the pumping of Emily's neck and her eyes saw Emily's heart fluttering like a captive creature, pounding beneath the torn blouse.

There was a button, hanging on a fragile string, that shuddered with each breath Emily took. Andrea watched it, responded, shuddered like that dangling button until, in her strange compulsive way, she took the button in her shaking fingers and tried to take it off. She tried gently but the thin string held, so she bent her head and took the button into her mouth and severed the string with her teeth.

"I'll . . . Have you got a needle and thread here? I'll fix it, honey. Don't worry. It's over. He's gone. Andrea will fix it. . . ."

Emily couldn't remember when she'd made the decision. She left the bathroom with Andrea and while Andrea prepared coffee for them, Emily sewed the button back on and repaired the rip in her sleeve. The shoulder seam had torn slightly as did the arm hole. She sat and sewed very carefully. The monotonous activity seemed to calm her. Then Andrea served the coffee and began folding the remaining cartons. When Emily put her blouse back on again, the decision was already made.

"I've got to go out now."

Andrea looked up. She'd begun to pile books into one of the cardboard boxes. "Why. . . ? Where. . . ? I

mean, wouldn't it be better to pack all this up? I can drive you to your new place and we . . . "

"Thank you . . . but . . . "

Andrea held up her hand. "Don't say it." She smiled. "I know. You've got to do it yourself."

"Yes. But I c-can't. Not now." Emily put on her coat and the hand-knitted tam Steven's mother had sent from Poughkeepsie last winter. "I've got to get out of here . . . I . . ." She took her purse from the table. Detective Luffrono's card was under it. She put it into her coat pocket.

Andrea had made no move to leave. She continued packing the books. "Mind if I hang around? I'd like another cup of coffee."

"But what if . . . he c-comes back?"

Andrea shrugged and smiled. It was a smile lit by the same contempt that had distorted her face when they'd spoken about Dr. Marin and she'd called her father a bastard. She went quickly to the kitchen. Emily heard the silver drawer open and then Andrea returned with a knife in her hand. "I hope he does," she said very quietly.

Emily's heart leaped. But Andrea simply picked up the ball of twine that lay beside the bookshelf and, with the ominous looking knife, cut a length of twine with which to tie the carton she'd filled.

Chapter 8

The single flight from her apartment to the vestibule from where she could see the street seemed a mile long. Emily held on tightly to the pipe railing. The stoop outside was clear and there were a few people passing the building on their way to work. A taxi dropped off a passenger two houses away. Emily quickly hailed the cab. She had Luffrono's card in her hand by the time she closed the backseat door behind her. She read the address to the driver, Morgan Brown, Jr., then sat back. Almost unconsciously she had begun to recite her speech exercises to herself. Brown shut off the soul station that had been playing on his transistor radio.

"What'd you say?"

Emily blushed. "I . . . I used to stutter. I was just practicing. I do these strange speech exercises, like tongue-twisters, you know. Like 'Seven lemmings lapping lemon liniment'. . . ."

"Whew!" he said. "I couldn't do that in a million years."

"Sure you could, Morgan. It just takes practice."

" 'Leven lemons leapin . . . ' " He laughed. "Can't do it. No way."

"How about 'A selfish shellfish'?"

"Selfish shellfish . . . Well, that ain't too rough."

"Okay," she said. Try this one: 'Eight witches and which witch wished the wicked wish' . . . "

"Naw. I think that one'll have to wait till graduation day. Selfish shellfish—that's my speed."

She taught him the first three exercises. Speaking with him, reciting the familiar phrases, soothed her nerves. Still, she had to remind herself, he was a cab driver, not a detective. It wasn't going to be as easy at the station house.

"Hey, you a cop?" Brown asked as he pulled up in front of the 12th precinct. Emily paid him and shook her head, no. Her tongue was thickening already. "Well, at least you ain't a robber," he said as he put her money into the cigar box on the seat beside him.

"Thanks. 'Bye, Morgan."

From the outside, the police station looked big and clean, as attractively maintained as most of the buildings in the neighborhood. But inside, it was painted a bilious green color, and even that ugly paint was peeling in places to reveal raw plaster and, in a spot or two, the wooden slatting beneath it. Nearly everything looked imprisoned. Even the bare light bulbs that glared from the ceiling were encased in metal cages. The desk sergeant peered down at her from an elevated platform separated from the rest of the vast room by a thick wooden railing. She felt small and nervous and she resorted, at the last minute, to handing him Luffrono's card.

He turned the card over and read the message on

the back. Then he phoned up to Luffrono. "Bob, there's a young lady here to see you, a Miss . . ."

"Emily, Emily Hollender."

"Emily Hollender. Sure." He hung up. "Okay. Go to the stairs." He pointed across the room to an ancient and ornate metal staircase which was painted the same institutional green as the rest of the room and which was of the same intimidating proportions. "One flight up; first door to the left."

She crossed the room and climbed the stairs feeling the chill of the place through her coat. The dampness and cold seemed to come through her gloves as well, as she held onto the bannister. At the top of the stairs she was confronted by a wide corridor with several unmarked rooms. Some of the doors were open, others shut. The first door to the left turned out to be a locker room in which a handful of men were changing into, or out of, uniform. That door was open. Farther down the hall, a frosted glass door with peeling gilt lettering was closed. The legend on the glass was impossible to decipher.

Emily heard typing from within. She walked toward the room and stood just outside the door, unable to force herself forward. She was trembling again. And her resolve was seeping away. She held on to the door knob which began to wobble in her hand. Suddenly a shadow appeared at the other side of the glass. She released the knob abruptly, the door opened, and Robert Luffrono stood before her. He was taller than she remembered; dressed in a sports jacket. His dark tie had been loosened and his collar button was open. She noticed that before she noticed his apologetic smile and that his deep-set eyes were paler than she'd thought.

"Miss Hollender, Hi. I'm sorry. I should have left the door open. Come in."

She entered a large office with an empty floor to

ceiling cage in one corner. Old metal and wooden desks were set up in a U-shaped formation around the room. She was vaguely aware of some other men, other detectives or plainclothesmen, moving about at the rear of the room. Only one man was seated. He had pale hair and was typing earnestly, if not efficiently.

Luffrono ushered her into the office. She stood at the center of the room, working hard at a doomed smile.

"Would you like to have a seat?"

The men at the rear exited through another unmarked door. The typewriter's staccato was the only sound until Luffrono pulled back a chair for her and it scraped loudly, metal on wood. She stared at him but did not sit down.

"Jim." The detective pounding on the vintage Smith-Corona looked up. Luffrono signaled to him and he pulled the report he'd been working on out of the machine.

"Right. I'll be with Persky, Bob," the man said and left by the rear door.

After a long silence, Emily spoke. "He came back."

Luffrono seemed stunned. "When?"

"This morning. He tried to break in but Andrea stopped him." Her words were careful and deliberate. It was all she could do to speak. She couldn't breathe urgency or, for that matter, any emotion into them.

Luffrono still held the back of the chair he'd pulled out for her. She sat down, and he walked around to the other side of his desk and picked a pen and pad out of the paperwork chaos. "What about the other night?" he asked, sitting down.

Emily stared down at her gloved hands. She took a deep breath. "He had a knife. He kept putting it in my mouth. I c-couldn't breathe. He tore m-my coat open, H-he m-made me p-pull m-my bra d-down." She glanced at him quickly then lowered her head again.

His head had been cocked, tilted toward her. She wished she could smile. He had looked as though he was rooting for her. As if every word she spoke was a victory for the good guys. "He had a tape recorder," she said finding her breath and her pace, at last. "I . . . had to make sounds. It was awful. He scared the h-hell out of m-me."

She lapsed into silence, half expecting him to congratulate her, to say: Good for you, Hooray for Emily. When she found the courage to lift her head, his expression was saying it. He seemed . . . proud of her.

He scribbled something rapidly on the pad in front of him. "Did you see his face?" he asked gently.

"Today—real quick. He's horrible . . ."

"A creep—"

She nodded her head. "A creep."

He put the pen down. "Yeah," he said, standing. "Look, how about I give you a ride home?"

"No, no it's not necessary. I like cabs. I really like cabs."

"You might feel better if . . ."

She stood. "I can handle it myself. Thanks . . . really, thanks."

The telephone rang. Luffrono hit the flashing button and picked up the receiver. "Yes? No it's Luffrono. Uh—uh—he's with Persky. Right."

He hung up and turned in time to see the back of her coat disappearing through the frosted glass door. He started to call to her, then stopped. He picked up the receiver again and called down to the desk. "Jackie? It's Luffrono," he told the sergeant. "There's an Emily Hollender coming down there. Flag a cab for her, will you?"

It was shortly after noon when she got to the museum. Steven had just left, one of the office staff told

Emily. He'd gone to pick up a missing piece of the new exhibit. He'd taken the station wagon.

Mike had filled in for her this morning. There was a class of third graders due at two, but Mike, who was at lunch now, was planning to work with them. Was Emily ill, the girl wanted to know. She looked tired.

She was tired, she decided. But she checked the schedule for the following day and found a quiet corner in which to work out a program for the class of fifth graders she'd been assigned. She was preoccupied and the normally routine planning became a complex chore. By the time she'd accomplished it, along with some interesting new ideas for the rest of the week, Mike was finishing up with the rambunctious gang of seven and eight year olds who would have been her responsibility.

Emily watched the bearded young instructor catching kids as they jumped out of the lucite model of a protein molecule through which they'd been crawling. He looked up and saw her on the balcony near the office. He smiled and waved and she felt grateful. Tomorrow, she promised herself, she'd make it up to him somehow.

She'd make it up to Jenny, too, she decided. But today she was going . . . home. To Manhattan. To Bridge Towers, the safe, clean, pet-less paradise across the river. She felt a pang of guilt about leaving the little cat behind for yet another night, but the thought of returning to Cranberry Street today was impossible.

She waved back at Mike and got her coat from the office. Steven had still not returned. She was relieved. She was in no mood to deal with the anger and guilt he'd certainly have provoked in her, or with the sullen helplessness with which he'd certainly try to defend himself. Home, Emily. And don't spare the cab fare. . . .

Gray clouds moved over the city but the snow that had seemed imminent this morning had still not fallen. She heard the revised weather forecast on the radio in Kenny Miller's cab: The probability of snow was only twenty-five percent for this evening, fifty percent tomorrow; the temperature was low—and with the wind-chill factor, another arctic night was in store.

The silhouette of Bridge Towers loomed in the distance as the taxi sped toward Manhattan. Kenny wanted to get in and out of the city fast, to avoid the rush hour crush. He dropped her off and immediately picked up another fare coming out of the building. But he made a V for victory sign at Emily which meant his new passenger was probably heading away from the heavily-trafficked areas. Emily responded with an A-Okay circle of her fingers, and the cab-driver winked and drove off.

"Hi . . . Gus?" she said cheerily to the uniformed doorman.

"That's right. Hiya, Miss Hollender. Listen, we put your stuff upstairs."

"My stuff?"

"Yeah. A girl . . ." He shrugged, trying to find a way to describe her. "A girl . . . in a sports car. Yeah. She made two trips."

Andrea drove a sports car. It was a classic of some kind, Emily remembered. A classic complete with letters and numbers like XK-something two plus two. "Oh, yes," Emily said. "Thanks."

"Right." He touched his cap and she started to walk past him. "Uh, Miss Hollender . . ." She turned. Gus had pulled the cap down low on his forehead and was regarding her slyly from beneath its brim. "She says she has the *cat* . . . but she won't be home tonight."

"Thank you," Emily said. She hoped it sounded ordinary and that the heat she felt in her cheeks was

not visible. In the elevator, it occurred to her that she should probably have given Gus a few dollars to insure his silence about "the cat." At least Andrea hadn't carried Jenny into the building under the doorman's florid nose. There was still a possibility that he didn't know that *the* cat was *her* cat, and soon to become an illegal alien in residence.

There were six cardboard boxes sitting in the middle of her bare apartment. A pile of clothing, neatly tied at the top of the hangers, was draped over the cartons. And, leaning against them, was a long pink florist's box. Emily locked the door behind her and crossed to the center of the room. She was smiling. The apartment, the view, the bright newness of it all, affected her once more, set her grinning happily. She knelt and untied the ribbon on the lovely pink box and opened it. On a bed of green tissue paper were a half dozen roses and a little white card that was signed, "Andrea."

She picked up the card and stared at it warmly. How lucky she was. How very sweet of Andrea . . . not only to have taken the trouble to pack the cartons and make two trips into the city to deliver Emily's belongings, but roses, too. How sweet, how thoughtful. How lovely to have fresh roses in her brand new apartment. Emily looked around for something to put them in. Perhaps, somewhere deep in one of the cartons she might find the ceramic pot she'd used for her dried flowers. Oh, but even if she chose the right box and did find the pot, it would be too small.

Her smile took on a mischievous glow. Ida Marx, she thought. Ida might have a vase or something to put the roses in. And it would be great, it would feel so good, to confront her neighbors again without getting flustered. To show them, to show herself, that she was capable of carrying on a civil conversation without biting her lip or blushing or whispering suspiciously on their telephone. Emily picked up the roses

and, with happy determination, walked across the hall to 6A.

Confidently, she pushed the door buzzer.

"Coming! Who is it?" She heard Ida's voice and then the sound of the peephole being opened.

"Mrs. Marx? It's your new neighbor, Emily Hollender. Remember?"

The peephole closed, the metal chain released, and Ida opened the door, cautiously. Her expression shifted from neutral to leery when she saw the flowers in Emily's hand. She glanced at the roses which Emily hefted up for her viewing, then stared at the girl. She shook her head slightly. It was a gesture of pity. The girl, Ida's face seemed to say, was nuts.

"Hi . . . You brought me flowers?"

Emily was momentarily baffled. "Oh . . . Oh no, I'm sorry. I was wondering if you have something I could put them in."

Ida studied the flowers again and reassessed the situation. "Don't be sorry," she said finally. "I'll give you a milk container." Then, after reflecting for a second, she asked, "Quart or half gallon?" Emily's mouth fell open. "Half gallon," Ida decided. The door closed and when it reopened, Ida Marx was carrying an empty milk container. She handed it to Emily then reached into her apron pocket and pulled out a scissors. "Here. You'll use these to cut off the top of the container. And the bottom of the roses. And put aspirin in the water."

"Thank you very much," Emily said. But Ida kept turning and looking annoyed at something behind the door, beyond Emily's view.

"You're welcome." She nodded her head, preoccupied by whatever was going on behind her, and Emily, feeling vaguely defeated, returned to her own apartment.

A few minutes later, as she was cutting the milk

carton, her doorbell rang. It was Ida carrying a vase.

"Mrs. Marx." Emily opened the door and Ida thrust the beautiful vase into her hands.

"Here, darling. Sam would like you to have this."

"I couldn't."

"Take it. And don't forget the aspirin!"

"Thank you," Emily said.

Ida was already shuffling back to her own apartment. "Very welcome," she called over her shoulder.

She had just about everything, Emily thought, as she switched off the tape recorder hours later. Her stuttering had improved beyond all expectation. Even the horrendous . . . set-back . . . hadn't destroyed her growing confidence that she'd be cured one day. Soon. Really cured, changed.

She switched off the lamp and burrowed comfortably into the warm quilted sleeping bag on the floor. She had a job she loved. She had a peaceful, safe place in which to live. And wonderful neighbors and friends. People who seemed to care about her, to like her—she didn't know why. Ida and Sam Marx, Andrea, Mike at work, and Millie, and . . . Detective Luffrono . . . "Good cop, Bob" . . . Tomorrow, there'd be Jenny, too.

She could smell the honeyed fragrance of the roses which she'd placed close by her sleeping bag. In the cloud-filtered moonlight, she could see the outline of the flowers and the lovely vase Ida and Sam had given to her. It was good to fall asleep listening to the wind and the sounds of traffic from a bridge that led to and from her past.

Chapter 9

It was a Jaguar XKE 2+2, British Racing Green, 1972—the last year they'd made that model. For the second time that day, Andrea drove the car recklessly along the street that ran parallel to the shipyards. There was a wrapped parcel in the back. It had been too long and bulky to fit, even diagonally, in the seat beside her, where she would have preferred it. She kept glancing into the rearview mirror to make sure it was safe.

River Street was an old and heavily trafficked street. It was deserted now, but the huge vans and trucks that carried cargo and parts to the shipyards by day had taken their toll. The road was treacherous with evidence. But the package was wedged in tightly. Each time she hit a pothole, Andrea glanced automatically into the mirror to make sure that the package hadn't bumped against the low roof of the car or been knocked about too dangerously, too violently.

She screeched to a halt in front of a big corner

building that had withstood the icy assault of many waterfront winters. 17 River Street. It was an old warehouse, six stories high and facing Manhattan. Lower Manhattan. It was only one of several buildings in Brooklyn that Julie Glassen had owned. Now it belonged to his daughter.

Andrea took the keys from her purse and the package from the backseat and she opened the padlock that secured the front door of the building. It was going to be converted to a series of living lofts in the spring. The old front steps had already been removed and replaced by a fashionable wrought iron staircase. Two carriage lamps would light the entrance. They were dark now, waiting. She put the padlock gingerly into her purse and unlocked the conventional latches on the front door.

The freight elevator had long ceased functioning. Andrea climbed the stairs to the top floor. Tomorrow, she thought, she would have the water turned back on. And maybe stock the small kitchen with essentials. She would also have a bed delivered. Nothing else for the present. She arrived at the sixth flight with only a trace of breathlessness. Her jogging had stood her in good stead. Like her father, she was strong. Unlike him, she wanted to share her strength.

She unwrapped the parcel and set up the telescope. She had traded in one of Julie's antique telescopes for this one and the ecstatic merchant, who had turned out to be a buff, had guaranteed the quality and range of the new model. Andrea carried the telescope and the tripod on which she'd mounted it to one of the windows that overlooked the river. She opened her purse and took out the miniature tape recorder and set it on the window sill near the telescope. The window alone gave a breathtaking view of the Manhattan skyline. Without even using the scope, she could pick out the striated layers of Bridge Towers across the

East River. She had stared at it long enough this afternoon.

Blinds. Tomorrow, she would order blinds for the windows as well. She remembered the fading green shades that had covered the windows in Jules Glassen's day. It was here he had taken her, two weeks after her mother's death. Andrea clenched her teeth and shuddered. Honey, he had called her, my honey. Bastard.

She adjusted the telescope. She turned on the tape recorder. "Pppppplease . . ." she heard Emily's voice pleading.

"Ahhhhhh," Andrea said. "Say, Ahhhhh, Emily."

Chapter 10

Anarchy. She'd left her apartment in reasonably good shape. She'd left the cartons stacked, but rolled up her sleeping bag and tucked the tape recorder behind the boxes—and she'd locked the door knowing that she had neatness and roses to come home to. Now, here was chaos, anarchy. Emily smiled and surveyed the excited group of school children standing, fidgeting, punching, slouching, whispering and shouting, before her. She took a deep breath. Then she tried to disguise the smile that kept creeping across her face. She put two fingers in her mouth and furrowed her brow meanly and she whistled.

That did it. It always did. The anarchic fifth graders turned as one and stared incredulously at her. She enjoyed the wonder and admiration her whistle had won. She let the smile return.

"Hello. Good morning. My name is Emily and I'm going to give your teachers a rest from you today."

Appreciative giggles interrupted the awed silence.

"In a minute we'll be heading downstairs. But first, I want to tell you I'm happy to be here. Are you happy to be here?"

"YEEEAAAHHHH!" they answered. Even the teachers joined in and sounded every bit as enthusiastic as the kids—

"Well, good!"

"Emily," Millie interrupted her, "telephone."

Her smile sagged. "Can't you take a message, Millie?"

The rhythm of her warm-up had been broken.

"It's about your cat . . ."

"Oh, right. Jenny." She turned to the children. "I'll be right back, okay?"

"I'll stay with them."

"Thanks, Millie. I'll hurry. Everyone, this is Millie. Millie . . . this is everyone. I'll be back as soon as I can." She walked past the kids quickly. The call had come in on the phone at the office entryway. It was off the hook. Emily picked it up. "Hello . . ."

"Emily," Andrea said.

"Andrea? Hi. Andrea, listen. It was terrific of you to haul all that stuff over. My cat . . ."

"No problem. I can keep her here as long as you want."

"What if I pick her up tonight?"

There was a pause. "Well . . ." Andrea began.

"I've got to smuggle her into the place. Andrea, I'd really like to do it tonight."

"I'll be here."

"Great. See you after work then. Oh, and . . . Well, I . . . The flowers, Andrea, they're wonderful. I feel like I have a guardian angel."

"You do."

Emily laughed. "See you tonight."

On her way back down to the children, she was waylayed by Steven. "Millie said you'd be here," he

told her. He looked at her face imploringly, then he looked down at the brightly striped carpeting. "Are you angry?"

No, she thought. Just say no and keep on going. You've got work to do; children waiting. You've got new friends, a new apartment, a new life . . . Steven is still living in the past. Poor, pale Steven. But suddenly, unexpectedly, she heard the man's harsh voice again; the voice that had asked her to describe what she was wearing. She could almost smell the breath mints and decay. She saw the hand shooting through the opened doorway. Her own hands went automatically to her stomach which had tightened and begun to churn spasmodically. She felt bruised. She felt angry.

"What do you expect me to say 'no?"

"Well, I'd expect you to . . . "

"Steven," she said with more control than she'd have suspected she could muster. "Something happened three nights ago . . . "

He cut her short. He looked up as if she'd slapped him and his watery eyes widened and his shoulders slumped. "You're seeing another man, right?" He pushed his glasses up and tossed his pale hair back.

Emily shut her eyes for a moment. "Don't. Please don't," she whispered. Then, she opened her eyes and began to walk past him, back to where the class of fifth graders was waiting.

He followed her for a step or two. "Is it someone I know?"

She wasn't certain she could speak. She wasn't afraid of stuttering, she was afraid of screaming. She thought that if she began to speak a sound, a noise, would start that she might never be able to stop. The noise would be a scream of anger and terror; it would be the death throes of a victim. She was astonished when she heard her own voice and heard that it was

quiet. "We didn't break up because there was anyone else," her quiet, sensible voice said. "Steven, what do you want? What is it that you want from me?"

"All I want is a kind word from my wife."

"I am not your wife anymore." Her voice was deplorably condescending. She would not dare speak to the children in a tone so pedantic, so pitying. She walked away from him quickly.

"You are my wife," he insisted, "until the divorce is final. And it doesn't matter who you're screwing."

She got through it. She got through the day and the anger and, by five, exhaustion had dulled her mind and memory. She hailed a cab outside the museum. Not even the bitter night wind could rouse her from the deep weariness that blanketed her brain. Somewhere in the back of her mind, she was grateful. She sat back in the taxi that was heading toward Andrea's house. She closed her eyes and rested as the cab followed the familiar route to Brooklyn Heights.

They were past Cranberry Street when she woke from her unexpected nap. Again she was grateful for the exhaustion. She'd awakened only a block from Andrea's brownstone. "There, Murray," she told the driver. "The one with the wooden bannister up ahead . . . and the brass lamp . . . "

"The Glassen house," he said, to Emily's surprise.

"Why, yes. How did you know?"

"He was a big shot, the old man. I drove him home once. Stiffed me on the tip. It was a radio call or else I wouldn't have known who it was. But I thought I remembered the address, and now I remember the house. I remember when he croaked, too. My wife—may she rest in peace—read it to me from the papers. She knew I'd driven him home. Who owns the place now?"

"His daughter . . . I guess." The cab stopped in front of the handsome brownstone. "Thank you, Mur-

ray," Emily said. She put a reasonable tip into his tray, aware that it wasn't contingent upon her to make up for Mr. Glassen's shortcomings.

"Thanks," he said, scooping the money out on his side of the safety glass. "I wonder what his kid's like. Ooo, he was a cold son-of-a-bitch . . . Pardon me. You get to know when you drive around a hundred fares a day, you know. You get a feeling for people. That Glassen . . . nevermind what the papers said about what a hot-shot good-guy he was. He was tight and cold as a lox. A lox, in fact, at least has a little salt, you know. This guy—nothing. Dead."

"Goodnight, Murray. Take care."

"Yeah. You, too," he said.

Emily used the brass knocker at the head of the stairs. She knew she'd have to press the bell eventually, but she liked the old-fashioned elegance of the knocker. To her surprise, Andrea answered the door before she'd put a finger on the bell.

"Hi. Come on in. You must be freezing. I just started a fire for us." Andrea's smile was warm and bright. She ushered Emily into the living room which was softly lit in the winter's early darkness. Tongues of light leaped through the fireplace screen arbitrarily illuminating rich patches of the vivid oriental carpeting, the rich brocades and antique silks, the leather and mahogany, that combined to give the room its extravagant beauty.

"Drink?" Andrea was holding a crystal glass filled with amber liquid. "Scotch?" she asked, raising the glass to Emily and then to her own lips.

"Something lighter, I think. Or else I'll collapse right here."

"Well, I've been inviting you to do that for ages . . ."

"Have you got any wine?"

"Sure, hon. White or red?"

"Doesn't matter. I'll probably feel it before I taste it."

"Drop your coat anywhere. I'll be right back."

Emily put her coat, hat and purse on the sofa and stood in front of the fire warming her hands. "Have you lived here forever?" she asked, when Andrea returned with the wine.

"Yes."

"What a wonderful house to grow up in."

"Do you think so?" Andrea asked in her strange husky voice. "I love it now, of course. But when I was young . . ."

Emily waited but the sentence hung wistfully between them, unfinished. "You didn't like it then?" she asked.

Andrea shook her head. "It was a lonely place. It still is . . . but I'm bigger." She laughed. "There's more of me to fill it. You've never seen anything but this floor, have you? I mean, you've hardly seen anything but this room. Come on, I'll give you the tour."

Emily followed Andrea from room to room and then up the first flight of stairs. Andrea's bedroom was the only contemporary room in the house; almost contemporary. Burnished steel and dark leather contrasted with a deep mauve carpeting. On the table beside her bed, photographs in ornate wooden, silver and gold frames crowded antique bibelots—a tiny jewel encrusted Russian Easter egg sat in a gold tripod; a porcelain cameo; a wedgewood cigarette cup. Emily examined the lovely array.

Andrea put her arm around Emily's waist and picked up one of the silver-framed photos. "My mother," she said. The picture was sepia-toned, a portrait of a delicate young beauty. She handed it to Emily. "Do you think I look like her?"

Emily didn't. The woman in the photograph had small almost childlike features. Her eyes were vaguely

reminiscent of Andrea's, but Andrea was attractive in a stronger, more overtly sensuous way. Perhaps she looked like her father, Emily thought. She glanced down at the photographs but there were none of Andrea's father; there were no men at all represented in the little table-top gallery.

"I don't look anything like her now," Andrea said suddenly, disconcertingly. "I did when I was younger. My hair and eyes—Julie thought I did, anyway."

"Julie?"

"Daddy Warbucks. Jules Glassen. My father." The words were clipped and bitter. "He was sick," Andrea confided after a pause. "But no one knew it. Except me, of course. I mean crazy-sick. That kind. People who knew him think I'm more like him than her." She shook her head and shrugged. "People, that is, who didn't know he was sick."

She took the portrait from Emily's hand and put it back among the others. "Come on," she said, leading her from the room. They returned to the crackling fire downstairs.

"You haven't touched your drink," Andrea said.

"Well, I'm not much of a drinker . . ."

Andrea smiled indulgently. "Well, a toast. To . . ."

" . . . to good friends."

"Yes. Good friends."

Emily took a small sip of her wine. "This is such a beautiful room." She looked up. Andrea was staring at her. Her pale green eyes, eyes flecked with brown and yellow like a cat's, were fastened on Emily. There was a look of longing in them; longing and sadness and something else, something Emily couldn't analyze or ignore. That is what Andrea's eyes must have looked like when she was a child, Emily thought suddenly. She had said she'd been lonely. There was profound loneliness in those eyes. And something else. Something . . . Emily felt herself blush.

"Stay awhile," Andrea urged softly. "Have dinner."

"Thanks, but I really have to go." She crossed to the sofa and started to put on her coat. "I'd love to have lunch this week though."

Andrea's eyes clicked off. That was what it seemed like to Emily. Like a light had been turned off behind Andrea's sad, imploring eyes. "Absolutely," she said. She downed the last of her scotch and raised the empty crystal glass toward Emily. Then she set it down on the fireplace mantle. "I've got a bag all set for smuggling your cat into that place. You did say you had to smuggle her in, didn't you?"

"Yes. Where is Jenny anyway?"

"Oh she's around." Andrea disappeared behind the sofa for a moment then emerged with a shopping bag, the bottom of which was covered with colorful skeins of yarn. "By the way, what happened with the police? That is where you went yesterday morning, isn't it?"

Emily was scanning the living room in search of Jenny. "They were really very nice."

"Really?" She handed the bag to Emily. "You can hide her under these."

"Uh-hu . . . Oh, that's great. Yes. They were very kind."

"They don't know who did it, of course."

Emily knelt to peer under the sofa. "No . . . not yet. Jenny! Time to go home."

"Are you sure you won't stay?"

"I can't . . . really. Jenny! Oh," she said, noticing the calico tail swishing nervously under a tufted leather chair. "There she is."

"Let me . . . " Andrea crossed to the chair and reached under it for Jenny. The frightened little cat lashed out at her. "Ow! Damn it!" Andrea said, jumping back. She licked her arm. When she moved her head, Emily saw the scratch. It was superficial but quite visible.

"Jenny!" Emily scooped the cat up quickly. "The house is new to her . . . You didn't mean to hurt Andrea, did you?"

"It doesn't matter. Here." Andrea held open the yarn bag that Emily had set down.

"I'm sorry about the scratch."

"Forget it. How're you getting home?"

"Cab." She put Jenny into her case and then put the cat carrier into the bag.

"No," Andrea said. "You're going to listen to me this time. I'll drive you. I insist."

It turned out to be a good idea. Gus was far more interested in Andrea's car than the shopping bag that Emily carried past him. She hurried through the lobby to the elevators while Andrea answered the doorman's questions about the power and vintage of the Jaguar. Emily was in the elevator when Andrea put the car in gear. Gus turned back to the lobby. He snapped his fingers. "Miss Hollender . . . there's someone . . . " he began. Then, seeing that she was gone, he shook his head and went back outside to try to catch a parting glimpse of the expensive sports car.

Emily was talking to Jenny as she emerged from the elevator. She looked up. A man was leaning against the wall near her door. He was reading a newspaper. It wasn't him. It wasn't the one who . . . She was almost certain. Still the color drained from her face. Her hands felt suddenly icy. Her heart began to thud again.

The man lowered his paper and Emily sighed and smiled but her heart continued to pound. The color flooded back into her face, too fast. She touched her cheek and felt the giddy smile and the heat that had surged into it. That's okay, she told herself. Better to be a happy, smiling fool than a terrified one.

"Hi," Bob Luffrono called to her.

"Hi. How long have you been here?"

"Oh," he said, folding the newspaper, "couple of minutes."

Ida's door opened a crack. "Twenty minutes if it's a second," came the cigarette raw voice with which Emily was becoming familiar.

"It's okay, Ida . . . "

"If it's okay, it's okay . . . You don't need my services." The door closed.

"You did a little disappearing act," Luffrono said.

Emily set the bag down and took the keys from her pocket. "How'd you find me?"

"It's a trade secret." His dark hair was shaggy, as if he'd been running his hand through it. The dark hollows around his pale eyes made him look very tired. She had an impulse to smooth his hair and touch the tired lines around his eyes. The thought brought a new surge of embarrassment, another flood of heat, into her face. It made her laugh, too.

"You called missing persons," she said, opening the door.

Luffrono laughed then, and they entered the apartment. A second later, Ida's safety chain rattled shut and two locks clicked back into place across the hall.

Emily turned on the light. The room looked barren except for the stacked boxes and the lovely vase. But the big, bare picture window provided a panorama filled with lights shining in starburst patterns from across the river and streaking, red, yellow, blue through the darkness onto the bridge. The sight delighted her again.

"Terrific view," Luffrono said.

She smiled at him, gratefully. "Is this . . . official?"

He pursed his lips and strolled to the window and stared out for a moment. "Well, actually . . . " He didn't turn, but she caught him watching her reflection in the window and he saw her and smiled again. "There's this little bakery . . . actually it's a restaurant,

too. Once a week I drive over the bridge to get these little cakes they make . . . " He faced her. "I thought I'd stop by and see how you're doing," he said. There was the smallest trace of a question in his voice.

"Thank you."

He looked at her and blinked. His boyish smile returned. "Oh sure. Actually, the restaurant part is terrific."

"I . . . I'll have to try it sometime. I . . ."

"What about getting a bite tonight?"

"Oh." They still had their coats on. In fact, she was still clutching the bag that hid Jenny. She considered for a moment. "I'm sorry, I can't tonight."

He dipped his head in acceptance and raked his hair with his fingertips. "Oh. Anyway . . . this place will be great when you fix it up." He looked at his watch. "I'd better get moving . . . " He shoved his hands into his pocket and walked to the door.

Emily opened it for him. "Thanks for stopping by. . . ."

"Bob," he told her. "We'll be in touch. Oh, and you can let the cat out of the bag now."

He closed the door behind him and, very carefully, as quietly as she could, Emily tiptoed to the peephole and looked through it. Luffrono looked back once. He ran his hand through his hair again, smiled, and disappeared down the corridor. Emily looked at the peephole across the way. She wondered whether Ida Marx was watching her watch Bob. The thought of it made her giggle. Or maybe it was the thought of him. Or maybe it was that she hadn't stuttered.

It had snowed through the night. The view from Emily's window, through the still-falling flakes, was more beautiful than last evening's glittering light show. She watched the city through what seemed like a con-

stantly moving lace curtain. She felt as excited and happy as a child.

She had to wait longer than usual for a cab that morning. On her way to the museum, she thought about Bob Luffrono's unexpected visit. She wondered briefly why she had declined his invitation. Then, suddenly, she thought about what had happened to her, about the rape, and when she looked out of the cab window again, the beautiful white snow had turned to soot-covered heaps along the curb and then to slush, ugly wet and gray streaks of snow that sprayed out from under the tires of passing cars and clogged the gutters and made the streets treacherous, dirty.

He had made her dirty.

Emily thought about it again in Dr. Marin's office. She thought that perhaps she ought to tell the immaculately groomed professional how dirty she felt and why. She also thought she might tell him that she had lied to Luffrono about not being able to go out with him last night. And then she thought that it hadn't really been a lie at all. There was something about the young detective that was decent and clean and kind. And until she felt that way about herself again, she couldn't go out with him. That's what she had said: "I'm sorry, I can't tonight." Last night was too soon. It wasn't a lie. She couldn't. And she was sorry that she couldn't.

"Emily . . . you're still expressing a certain hostility toward therapy," Marin said after the usual five minutes of silence that began their session.

She made an effort to concentrate. The last time she'd seen him, he was telling her that she was an angry person and that her silences were signs of that anger directed at him.

"I know you think it's some kind of transference stage I'm going through. . . . " She thought it over again. "You're wrong," she said firmly.

"What is it then?"

"It's not a stage . . . " She wished she could tell him about the assault . . . the rape. She wished she liked and trusted him, but she didn't. And he insisted that liking him had nothing to do with therapy. "It's not anything," she said, at last.

"You're frustrated."

"Yes!" she replied quickly. "Dr. Marin, I'm not really sure . . . I've never been sure . . . if any of this helps. What have I accomplished?"

She hoped for an answer, a real answer to her real question.

He leaned back in his handsome leather chair and put his hands together and started doing that spidery thing with his fingertips. It looked spidery to Emily. His fingers looked like a spider doing push-ups on a mirror.

"What do *you* think you've accomplished?"

She almost groaned aloud at the predictability of the response. She watched his fingertips and thought that maybe she'd toss him a bone; maybe she'd tell him that his hand reminded her of a spider. Let him gnaw on that one for a while. But, of course, she didn't. "Nothing," she said softly. "I don't know any more now than I did before. Maybe it's different for somebody else. I suppose it's different for Andrea."

His hands came together and he touched them, prayer-like, to his chin. "Andrea?" He was suddenly, irritatingly alert.

"What I mean is, I don't think this is the way for me to help myself. Andrea is . . . complicated. Working things out is important to her."

"And you're not like that?"

"No . . . " She gave a little laugh. "I stutter."

"Less," he said, smiling smugly.

"It was getting better before I came to you. . . . " Oh, Lord, it sounded so childish. But that was how

she felt, she realized suddenly. That was how he—or the analytical process, perhaps—made her feel: like a child. Dr. Marin, peering over his pious fingertips at her, watching, waiting, insisting that she needed help and that he could help her. Insisting that she couldn't possibly do anything as important as not stuttering all by herself. She wondered what he would say if she told him that she wanted to do things for herself; that she could, was capable of, enjoyed, helping herself?

Probably he'd say, "Can you? Are you? Do you?"

Emily smiled.

"What do you think of Andrea?" Marin asked abruptly.

"I don't know her very well." She thought about it. "I think she's . . . very independent." Yes. It was the thing she admired most about Andrea. Her gutsy independence.

"Independent?"

"She doesn't seem . . . scared." Emily tried to elaborate.

"Of what?"

She thought about the man at the door. She could almost see his hand again, groping toward her. She thought about how immediately and fearlessly Andrea had come to her rescue—and succeeded. "Of anything," Emily said.

"Do you like her?"

She studied Dr. Marin's face for a moment. It occurred to her that they were discussing another of his patients now. She would like to have asked why he wanted her opinion of Andrea. "She's very nice," she said dully. Then she lapsed into silence again.

After a while, Dr. Marin looked at the clock on his desk. The clock faced him, of course. "We still have oh, almost fifteen minutes left. How would you like to use the time?"

She hadn't thought about it. She opened her mouth and discovered that it was all worked out, settled. "By getting out of here, Dr. Marin," her amazing mouth said brightly, "I am leaving." And she laughed and left.

It had stopped snowing. A taxi had just pulled up outside. Feeling happy and lucky, Emily hurried from the mock Tudor portals of Marin's building toward the cab. The woman who'd hopped out of the backseat was leaning back in, talking to the driver—She seemed angry. "I meant it," Emily heard her say in a deep, forceful voice. Then the woman straightened up and started to slam the rear door. It was Andrea.

Emily grabbed the door. Andrea stared at her, bewildered. It was such a strange stare that Emily's smile began to seem strained to her. She was about to jettison it and ask Andrea what was wrong, when Andrea said, "Aren't you out early?"

"God no," was all she could think to answer. She smiled happily at Andrea and jumped into the cab.

"You want to have a cup of coffee?" Andrea asked, still holding the door open.

"I'll call you later. I've got to run." Emily took hold of the handle and waited while Andrea continued to stare at her. It seemed like an eternity but it was only for a moment, and then Andrea released the door and Emily pulled it shut. "Call you." She felt compelled to reassure Andrea. The cab moved away from the curb before Emily had given the driver the destination. He—Lawrence Obecny, according to the license on the dashboard—seemed as eager to leave Andrea behind as Emily had been to escape from the confused, wavering child she'd left seated across the desk from Dr. Marin. "Great day, isn't it Larry?"

"Lawrence," he corrected her. "I don't think so. Where to?"

The panel between the seats was closed, but she

heard his grumbled response. "Brooklyn Children's Museum," she said, trying not to let his bad humor ruin a banner day for her. "St. Marks Avenue entrance, okay?"

He nodded. His hair was greasy and the cloth collar of his leather jacket was stained and frayed. Emily sat back and stared out at the slush for a while. There was an annoying odor in the cab. She couldn't identify it but it fed into the little stream of pessimism that was beginning to erode her new-found spunkiness and spirit.

"You know, Larry," she said, trying to rekindle that spirit. "I've always thought that being a cabdriver was one of the most interesting professions in the world. You get to meet so many . . ."

"That's bull," he interrupted. "You crazy? What do you know about driving a cab?"

Emily leaned forward slightly. Her eyes peered through the scratched and smudged panel between the seats. Something in Obecny's voice, the sound, not the words, the cadence and the anger, provoked her. She tried to examine the small photograph of him beside his name on the hack license. The photo was murky through the glass.

"I . . . I r-respect cabdrivers," she said.

"Speak up!" he commanded, "I can't hear ya!"

She had stuttered. He was a cabdriver. However gruff and unpleasant he was, he was a cabdriver! A memory from the night of the rape flashed unexpectedly into her mind. She remembered seeing the hood of a yellow cab. She remembered thinking that where there was a cabdriver she was safe. Now, flustered and stunned, Emily tried to get a look at his profile. She moved a little closer to the glass.

He took a corner and she was almost thrown off balance by his recklessness. His hand moved on the steering wheel and a dirty white bandage caught her

eye. His two middle fingers were bandaged; a black and blue line ran across the others. The ugly bruise sliced the back of his hand which was very large and extended from a frayed gray cuff as worn and greasy as the collar of his jacket.

Obecny's bandaged hand left the steering wheel for a moment and dropped from view onto the seat beside him. It reappeared clutching a bag of Sen-Sens. He tore the bag open with his teeth and spilled some of the black dots onto his tongue.

The odor set Emily trembling. She sat back, crushing herself against the seat, fighting desperately for control. She pushed her hands into the pockets of her coat; she made fists of her hands. Still, they shook.

"L-listen, L-larry . . . I forgot." She took a deep breath. "S-stop. S-top, here, at th-this c-corner . . . a minute." She opened her pocketbook and began to rummage in it for the card, for Luffrono's card, as if it held the power to strengthen and calm her. Her trembling fingers closed around it tightly. "I have to p-phone someone," she said. "I forgot. Stop."

He pulled up to a phonebooth on Atlantic Avenue. "The flag stays down," he told her.

She was having trouble opening the door. "I don't m-mind."

"Bull," he grumbled. "Bull, you don't mind."

Emily opened the door and got out. The street was hazardous with melting snow, slippery. There was nowhere and no way to run. She hadn't paid him. He would follow her. She walked to the phonebooth with Luffrono's card in her hand. She fumbled in her purse for a dime. Then she dialed the number.

It took them a little while to locate him. The desk sergeant must have told him that whoever was looking for him was stuttering because when he did get on the line he seemed to know it was her. "Slow and easy," he said when she began to speak. "It's all right."

And it almost was. Her hands almost stopped trembling. Her heart almost slowed down. He was patient and reassuring. He started out calling her Miss Hollender, then switched to Emily. "You're very brave, Emily," he said, just before she hung up.

She got back into Obecny's cab. "I . . . I m-made a mistake," she told him. "M-make a left at the next street, p-pplease."

"You don't know where you're going. That's the trouble—nobody knows where they're going."

"I f-forgot, I have to m-meet a friend." *You're very brave, Emily. You're very brave.* She followed Luffrono's instructions.

"You live in Brooklyn Heights?" Obecny asked when they were almost there.

"No."

He stared at her in the mirror. He licked his lips in concentration. His tongue was black from the Sen-Sens. His lips curled back revealing his large, uneven gray teeth. "I think I've seen you before."

"I d-don't think so, Larry."

"Why do you keep calling me Larry? Lawrence is my name! Larry is bullshit. Bull, you know?"

"S-sorry, Lawrence."

"I bet," he said sullenly.

"N-next left. Left, here."

"You live in Brooklyn." He executed the turn carelessly then focused on her in the mirror again. "I know you."

"Th-this is it. J-just pull over here, Lawrence."

"You're cute," he said, pulling over to the curb, "and I don't forget cute sweets. I'm sure I've seen you before." He stopped and turned, grinning at her. Emily opened the door. "Hey!" Obecny shouted. But she ran toward the building, toward the big, attractive facade of the 12th precinct and she cowered there, against the wall.

Obecny turned, ready to go after her. He had one hand on the door handle. He never got a chance to press down on it. Luffrono threw open the door and shoved his revolver into the cabdriver's cheek. "All right, shit face," he said very quietly, "Out. *Out* of the cab."

A big detective reached in past Luffrono, whose two hands were locked on the gun. The man lugged Obecny out of the front seat.

"What the hell is this? What'd I do? What'd I do, huh?"

The deserted street was suddenly filled with cops. Guns drawn, they converged on the cab. Two uniformed men and the big detective grabbed the hulking driver who was thrashing and raving. He slipped and slid in the mushy street. They threw him against the hood of his cab. "Scum bags!" he screamed. "What the hell is this? Hey, take it easy!"

Luffrono wrenched Obecny's hands behind his back and cuffed them. "All right. Get him on his feet!" The policemen who'd wrestled the cabdriver down onto the hood, hauled him up now. One of them pulled a Miranda card from his pocket and started to read from it:

"You are under arrest. You have the right to remain silent . . . "

"Read him his rights inside," Luffrono ordered.

Obecny stared furiously at the young detective. "You're crazy," he snarled. "You're *all* crazy!"

The police unceremoniously hustled him into the station house. Bob Luffrono looked around, then hurried over to Emily. He was exhilarated, smiling. "Are you all right?"

She stared at him, transfixed. More in awe than in fright, she had watched him take control of the situation. She had marveled at his efficiency, his courage, his coolness, as the plan he had improvised a few

minutes ago on the telephone unfolded before her eyes; unfolded and succeeded.

He was puffing a little. His breath turned to smoke as it hit the cold air and Emily watched the little clouds envelope his words. "You were great, you're the best," he enthused. "Look, you want to go for a cup of coffee?" She stared at him, then managed a small shake of her head. Finally, she had to look away. "There's that cake place near you we could go to." She looked down. His shoes were half-buried in the slush, his trouser cuffs were soaked. "Don't you want to do something?" She thought he should change. She thought he must be very cold and uncomfortable. "Something special?" Luffrono persisted.

Emily tore her eyes from his wet cuffs and shoes. She looked at his face again. She looked into his eyes. They were feverish with excitement, pleasure. His eyes looked like her eyes felt. She wondered if she were crying or whether it was the cold air stinging her eyes or whether it was the same triumphant glow that shone from his eyes. "We should celebrate . . . "

"Yes," she said.

Chapter 11

Andrea was staring out the window. Dr. Marin watched her and waited. She had said practically nothing since the session began. Finally, he cleared his throat. "Andrea, how are you this morning?" She didn't turn from the window. Her hand was at her throat. She sighed and let it slip to her chest and she held it there as if her heart were palpitating and she was mesmerized by the rhythm of it. "Andrea . . . Andrea?"

She turned her head slowly. Her eyes blinked as she brought him into focus. "Yes," she said. "What?"

"Is something troubling you? I mean something right now?"

"No, nothing."

"You seen preoccupied."

"And you want to know why." She walked to his desk and picked up her purse. She opened it and started to take out her cigarette pack, then she changed

her mind abruptly and tossed the pack back, and she sighed.

"If you wish to tell me."

Andrea stared into the bottom of her purse. The miniature tape recorder was there. So were several scraps of paper on which fragments of a new poem were written. There were more lines crossed out than legible. It was a difficult poem to compose; more revealing than the first she'd written to Emily. She closed the purse and flipped shut the soft leather flap that folded over the top like an envelope flap. Then she raised her yellow-green eyes to Dr. Marin.

He already knew so much about her, more than anyone else alive. He knew about her father. It was Dr. Marin who had urged her to view her father as sick, rather than as an unnatural and malicious monster. He hadn't been a child molester; he'd been sick. He'd been temporarily sick with grief at the death of his young wife. It had only happened once, hadn't it? Her father had not persisted after the first and only incident.

Incident! Dr. Marin had called it an incident . . . just as the police woman, Lavaco, the cheap blonde who'd been trying to comfort Emily, had done.

But why had her father rejected her so completely after . . . after the incident? Why had he punished Andrea for his crime? She had been a child, a good little girl who'd wanted desperately to comfort her grieving father. Why had he looked at her with such contempt and loathing afterwards; as if *she* had been wanton, as if *she* had been sick?

Guilt, of course. But little girls could be very seductive, Dr. Marin had pointed out. Unconsciously seductive, but effective nevertheless. Little girls had a desire to succeed their mothers; to imitate and replace their mothers in winning the attention and affection of their

fathers. Surely, Andrea knew that; surely, she'd read or heard about the Electra complex.

Still, she'd thought that Dr. Marin was being terribly unfair. It was as if he were taking Julie's side over her's. As if he actually believed that Andrea had wanted her father to . . . to mistake her for her Honey-Mommy . . . as if she'd actually enjoyed having him take her into his arms in that dark warehouse and love her in that filthy and terrible way.

No. If she had enjoyed it, wouldn't she have been able to, wanted to, love someone like that again? Wouldn't there, after all this time, have been other men? No, she'd told Dr. Marin. There were no other men. There never had been. There never would be.

Julie had been a depraved bastard. A cold, unnatural monster. He'd done something disgusting and crazy and then he'd discarded his victim, his own daughter, as if *she* were disgusting and crazy. She would never do that. Never, Andrea swore. Did Marin know what it was like to be discarded, deserted, at the age of six? Lonely! Terrifyingly lonely! And, if ever the miracle that they were both—Dr. Marin and she—working toward, hoping for, came to pass; if ever Andrea was capable of loving again, she would protect and take care of the one she loved. She would made certain that her lover was never scared or lonely!

Dr. Marin had called that unrealistic. Everyone is scared sometimes, Andrea; and everyone gets lonely. It wouldn't be realistic to expect to love and protect another human being that completely. In fact, it wouldn't even be desirable to do so. People grow through experience and much of life's experience can be painful . . . or lonely or frightening sometimes. But people learn and grow from negative, as well as positive, experience.

Andrea hadn't argued about that. She didn't believe

it, but she didn't argue. After all, Dr. Marin had also told her that Julie must have loved her more than she'd understood. Hadn't her father, Marin asked, provided for someone to help repair the damage he'd done her? Hadn't Jules Glassen insisted, in his will, that she enter therapy, see a psychiatrist? Andrea had wanted to puke when Marin said that. He'd made Julie sould like such a good guy, such a swell father. She didn't argue with Dr. Marin, but she was never sure after that whose side he was on.

She didn't argue about whether Julie had secretly loved her more than she'd understood, and she didn't argue about whether it was unrealistic or undesirable to take care of someone you loved. She just knew that if she ever fell in love, and that person needed her, she could and would protect them from the loneliness and longing she had suffered as a child. They only had to *need* her. They only had to understand how much they needed her protection, and she would make certain that they were never lonely again. They had to know how dangerous the world was, and she would protect them . . . completely.

"Andrea?"

She wanted to tell him. But she wanted to savor her secret, too. "I'm working on a poem," she said at last. "A new one. Would you like to hear about it?"

"All right."

"It's about love . . . " He didn't smile or seem happy for her. She was glad she'd decided to begin with the poem and not tell him everything at once. Ah, but he did look surprised; very, very surprised. All right, then. She'd begin with the poem. After that, she might tell him more. She took the scraps of paper from her purse and began to put them in order. She looked at the little tape recorder, then shut her purse again. It all depended on how he reacted to the poem. Maybe

she'd tell him about the tape, maybe not. Maybe she would even play it for him, if only he'd understand and share her joy. But she couldn't be sure whose side he was on. Not yet.

Chapter 12

They called him "The Broom." Almost every police station had one, an ex-cop who'd come up with a screw loose after years of service but who needed the familiarity of the station house to function. So they'd let him hang around and be useful. Useful was to help keep the place clean. At the 12th precinct, The Broom's name was Mo, and he stuttered.

Bob Luffrono took the bottle of wine out of his desk drawer and put on his coat. Swid was pecking out another report. "Jim, have you seen Mo?"

Swid looked up. "He's probably in the locker room . . . Hey, you got a date tonight Bobby?"

"Yeah, I've got a date. Do I look all right?"

"Personally, I go for blondes but, sure, you look all right."

Luffrono straightened his tie and ran his fingers through his hair. He grinned at Swid. "Good." Then he tucked the bag with the bottle under his arm and went to find Mo.

The old guy was talking to himself. He was in the locker room where Jim said he'd be and he was re-running old shootouts in the aisle between the benches and the rows of old metal lockers.

"I hate to hurt you boy, but if I have to, I'll kill you. . . . " He lowered his voice. Luffrono could hear him mumbling, but couldn't make out the words. Then, suddenly, he was audible and on the case again. "That's right! It's what you are. A boy! You're foolin' with me, don't fool with me. I will kill ya!"

He was dressed in a gray janitor's uniform. His face and hands were very dark, almost black. His mustache was white and his hair, particularly the sideburns, was salted with cottony patches. He was not as old as he looked, but he'd been old for a new recruit in the days when black cops were scarce and young black cops almost non-existent.

Luffrono's gut churned as he watched the broken officer swiping at the floor with a wet and stinking mop. He pressed in on his stomach where the knot was twisting, then scuffed the doorjamb to alert Mo to his presence. "Hey, Mo . . . Hi."

"Hey, man!" The Broom was still fighting ghosts.

"Mo! How are you doing? I . . . ah, come to ask you a question."

Mo squinted at him. "Uh-hu . . . "

"It's about, a . . . stuttering."

The old man dropped his mop into the pail, swirled it around futiley in the filthy water, and bent to wring it out. "W-w-w-what about it?" he said, as Luffrono knew he would.

"There you go. But when I came in, I heard you . . . No stutter. How come?"

Mo shook his head. "W-w-why?"

"I have a date with this girl. She's terrific. I'm going to see her tonight. And . . . she stutters."

"What's so t-tterrific about her?"

Luffrono grinned. "I don't know. Everything, Mo, everything. Listen, is there something I can say . . . to put her at her ease . . . ?"

Mo turned and went back to mopping. He looked grim. "Ain't no way," he said bitterly.

"There's got to be a way."

"Forget-t-tt her."

The grin left Luffrono's face abruptly. He stared coolly at Mo. Then he looked at his watch. "Yeah, well . . . I've got to be there at seven . . . See you later." He left the locker room, annoyed at The Broom and at himself for expecting help.

When he was gone, Mo looked up again. "You know when you tighten up on the straps on the guy in the electric chair," he said, without stuttering, to the empty doorway where Luffrono had been. "What you say to him to make him feel better . . . You say that."

Jim Swid passed the door and Mo shut up. "You seen Bob Luffrono?" Mo pointed toward the stairs and Swid hurried away. He caught up with Luffrono on the landing.

"Hey, Bob. We just got a call about that cab driver, Obecny . . ."

"Yeah?"

Swid shook his head. "He's got a partner. . . ."

"He's got a partner? What does that mean?"

"He says someone paid him to assault Emily Hollender." Swid's face anticipated the disbelief he knew he would see on Luffrono's. "A woman," he said.

"A woman? What are you talking about? Who, for Christ sakes?"

"He won't say—unless the charges are dropped. It's weird, sounds weird. I don't know, it could all be bullshit, you know."

"Yeah. Listen, I'll see you tomorrow, Jimmy. Take it easy there."

"Take it any way I can get it." Swid laughed. "Tomorrow, Bob. See you."

A woman, Luffrono thought, as he drove toward Manhattan. That was an interesting twist. He hadn't thought Obecny was capable of being that inventive. The driver had seemed like a simple stupid creep; just another dumb animal unfit to live among human beings; a dangerous creep who needed to be caged. All right, so he had an imagination, too. There was no law that said trapped animals couldn't go haywire and come up with a freaky angle like, all of a sudden, pulling out a woman accomplice to rape.

Luffrono moved into the traffic heading for the bridge. It was heavy leaving the city; lighter going in his direction, from Brooklyn into the heart of the Apple. He thought about making a quick stop at the bakery-restaurant near Emily's place to pick up some desert for them. There wasn't time, but the notion made him smile. What an Italian thing to do; to think of doing, he corrected himself.

He had a picture in his mind of relatives who never showed up without a bakery box dangling like some special holiday appendage from their hands. You visit a home, you bring something . . . especially if you're going for dinner. It came from the old neighborhood days, he guessed, when everyone was poor, but it had spread out with growing affluence to the suburbs. In the old days, his mother would bake something to bring along when they were going to visit relatives or friends. It had taken them years to convince her that store-bought cakes and cookies were not an insult to her hosts.

There wasn't time to stop at the bakery now, Luffrono decided. But, at least, he'd brought wine—a second generation sophisticate he was. Although he remembered an uncle from the old country who always brought wine, too. Homemade wine that could

do everything they used drugs for now—get you high, romantic, sleepy . . . or in trouble with the law.

Luffrono saw Bridge Towers nestled in the curve of the off ramp ahead. He wondered which light was hers. He tried to count six stories from the bottom of the building. He couldn't do that and drive, too, so he gave it up. But he was sure he could find her window if he didn't have to concentrate on doing something else.

They'd decided to celebrate at her apartment instead of going out. He was disappointed, at first. He wanted to take her out. He'd liked the idea of showing her places and enjoying them again with and through her. It wasn't only that she was from out of town. She'd lived in Brooklyn for a while and she'd probably get to know Manhattan better than he in a couple of months. But she had, he was sure of it, a capacity for enthusiasm, an openness and naivete, that would find excitement in the unexplored quiet places that other people tended to ignore. She had a hungering for joy. He sensed that in her. And he sensed that she was just getting started in pursuit of it. He'd really like to go along for that ride, he thought—he'd really like to see her going after and getting what she wanted.

The reason she'd given for not going out tonight was that she had some furniture being delivered this evening. She didn't suggest for a minute that her third encounter with that sick bastard, Obecny, might have shaken her up, made her want to stay close to home tonight. She was really very brave. He wondered if she knew that. He wondered if he'd told her that he thought so. Then he remembered that he had, on the phone, when she was with the cabdriver. He felt good about that.

Luffrono found a parking spot after driving around the block only three times. In Manhattan, that was like winning the lottery. He locked the car and

walked in the icy night toward the yellow lights of Emily's lobby. He shook his collar down on the way to the elevator. He decided, at about the third floor, to take off his scarf. It had been a Christmas gift from his neice and it looked like it. It turned him into Uncle Bobby whenever he wore it.

He folded the scarf and stuffed it into his coat pocket but the bulge made him look like he had a hernia. He pulled the scarf out of his pocket, as the elevator opened on six. He was still trying to figure out what to do with it when he got to Emily's door. He tried to drape it casually over his arm. Great, he thought. Between the scarf and the wine, she'd think he was a waiter. Finally, he tossed it back around his neck, and let it just hang there, open.

He rang the bell. Then, on impulse, he turned toward the Marxes' door and pretended that the peephole was a mirror in which he could study his appearance. He preened, facing the door. He adjusted the scarf and then his tie and then he ran his fingers through his hair. "How do I look, Ida?" he whispered.

"Hi," Emily said.

"Oh. Well. Hi there." He pulled the scarf from around his neck, wound it around his hand, crumpled it, and moved past her into the apartment. "Very nice," he said, nodding toward the little table and chairs that were set up near the window. "Is that the new stuff you were waiting for?"

"Yes," she said. "Can I take your coat?"

"Oh, yeah. Sure." He had the wine in one hand and his scarf in the other and the coat was off his shoulders and halfway down his arms before he realized that he was stuck. He laughed and Emily came to his rescue. She emptied his hands and carried the wine bottle into the kitchen.

They ate salad and chicken and potatoes and

freshly-steamed broccoli and they drank wine, a bottle and a half of wine—all of his and half of the bottle she'd bought. Just before coffee, he asked her about stuttering. He wanted to know whether she knew what caused and cured it. She didn't, precisely. There were many theories, few absolutes. But stuttering, it turned out, had ancient and venerable roots.

" 'O Lord, I am not eloquent,' " she quoted Moses' complaint from Exodus, " 'and neither have I been before, or since you spake to me, but I am slow of speech, and slow of tongue.' "

Luffrono listened attentively. Emily continued. She seemed a little uncomfortable but not eager to stop. "The most famous stutterer of them all, and the best loved, was Demosthenes." She wandered over to the window and peered out at the bridge. "You see Demosthenes realized he had to overcome his speech problems or he wouldn't have a chance in life. Then one day he went to court to see the great lawyer, Callistratus . . . "

"I remember the case," Luffrono said.

She laughed. "I'm sorry." She returned to the table, picked up her wine glass and took another sip. There was something on his mind, some reason why he's brought up the subject. She'd just been filling time with her stories and examples of famous stutterers. She'd just been name-dropping, she thought, and the idea of it amused her. But now she was eager to find out what he'd been leading up to. She sipped the wine and waited.

"You know," he began casually. "About stuttering and, uh, about testifying . . . "

Emily put the glass down and began to clear the table.

"You can get by with just a written statement," Luffrono said softly. He was drawing furrows into the

table cloth with the tines of his fork. "You won't have to testify."

"I understand," she said. She started to carry their dinner plates to the kitchen.

"Wait. No you don't." She glanced over her shoulder at him but didn't stop. "I see defense attorneys tear up witnesses all the time . . . " he called in to her, "especially where there are questions about sex."

She returned with the coffee pot.

"You'll have to face Obecny—do you want the agony of that when we can get you off with just a statement?"

Emily sat at the table. She rested her chin in her hands and stared at him for a moment, then she lowered her eyes. "I don't suppose it ever occurred to you that I might be able to help . . . by handling myself well on the witness stand."

"Well, I didn't mean . . . "

She sighed and began to pour the coffee. "I know what you meant, Luffrono," she said.

He reached across the table and took her wrist. "No . . . you're wrong." She stared down at his hand and he released her. "You're absolutely wrong." She put down the coffee pot. "Hey, are you okay?"

"You're the detective. You figure me out."

"I will." He finished pouring their coffee. "How about a movie? Do you want to go to a movie?"

"Sure. Which one?"

"Got a newspaper?"

She brought the paper to the table and they searched through the film ads together. "What's on TV?" he asked when the movie pickings looked slim.

"Oh, great. Terrific," Emily enthused as she ran her finger down the page of television listings. "There's a wonderful old movie on. What time is it? I think we've got just enough time to do the dishes before . . . "

"We? Oh, great. Terrific," he mimicked her.

"Whose celebration is this anyway?"

"Boy, are you going to be impressed. I do great dishes. I mean, I *dry* great. I don't like to get my hands wet too much. It's not good for my callouses. You need callouses in my line of work. Just for the image, you know—rough and ready . . . "

She raised an eyebrow skeptically.

"Okay, okay," he said. "I'll wash—everything except the silverware and pots . . . oh, yeah . . . and the glasses. I'm death on glasses. Honest. What's on?"

"*Now Voyager,* with Bette Davis and Paul Henreid. It's one of my favorites . . . a real tear-jerker."

"Sounds like a swell way to celebrate—washing dishes and crying."

Emily laughed. "You should have known me a year ago. Then I'd have done all the dishes—washed and dried—and I'd have watched 'Starsky and Hutch' without a peep."

He grimaced.

"I mean, we would have watched anything *you* wanted to watch . . . even if it bored me to death. I'd never have dared say what it was I wanted a couple of years ago."

"What rotten luck . . . to have met you on the way up."

She blushed suddenly, but she couldn't stop smiling. "Do you think so? I mean, do you really think . . . Does it seem as though I'm on the way up? It does to me, you know. That's not nice to say, is it? But . . . " She stopped. He was staring at her. He was smiling. It was a warm, happy smile. He realized that she'd stopped and was looking at him and he gave her a thumbs-up sign.

"Yes," was all he said. Then he pushed back his chair and they started to clear the table together.

When the dishes were done, they brought their

coffee, two fresh wine glasses and the remains of the second bottle of burgundy back into the living room. The TV was propped up on the last of the boxes waiting to be unpacked. Emily looked over at the chairs. They were fine for dining, but small, wooden and straight-backed. She wasn't sure how they'd do for TV viewing. Uncomfortable was her guess.

"Feel like roughing it?" she asked Luffrono. "I could unroll my sleeping bag and we could watch the movie, sort of picnic-style."

He helped her unroll the quilted bag and they moved it close to the wall opposite the TV set. Luffrono had taken his jacket off in the kitchen and put it back on when the dishes were done. Now, he walked to the picture window while Emily refilled the glasses and coffee cups they'd set down on the floor. He looked out, across the water, trying to identify landmarks along the Brooklyn shore: the old Navy yard, the elegant new restaurant, The River Cafe, built on a moored barge and decorated like a luxury liner with handsome teak and brass fittings, freighters and tankers and tug boats riding steadily above the spray of a winter choppy sea, the shipyards, the warehouses and waterfront tenements, stevedore's bars . . .

Emily had turned on the television set and was adjusting the picture. "Okay if I take my jacket off?"

"Oh, sure. Of course."

He did. He stood in front of the big picture window and took off his sports jacket and loosened his tie and stretched. Then the overhead light went out and only the little lamp glowed on the floor and the television set cast a long ghost-white shadow across the space between the box on which it was perched and the quilted mat against the wall where Emily sat cross-legged, sipping her wine.

Little girls could be very seductive. Unconsciously

seductive. And if there was a man around to take advantage of their deep and desperate need for love, little girls could get hurt.

Andrea could hardly see through the telescope. Her eyes were blinded by tears. She tore herself away from the window where she'd just seen the detective, Luffrono, begin to undress. He'd removed some of his clothing and then the lights in Emily's apartment had been dimmed. Too dim for her to see them anymore . . . to know who had shut the light . . . or why.

No! She put both hands over her mouth and the word, the denial, reverberated in her brain, unspoken: No!

She needed a telephone. Emily had a telephone now. Andrea had seen it, noticed it for the first time tonight. She wanted, needed one, too—here, now. She wanted to call Emily, to hear her voice, to warn her about the consequences of trying to love and comfort men. She needed to tell Emily that there was only one person in the world she could trust to protect her. Tomorrow she'd have a telephone installed in the loft.

Andrea took a cigarette from her purse. Sitting on the bed that had been delivered that afternoon, she clawed at her arm, picked at the scratch that Emily's cat had made, until it bled anew. Then she lit the cigarette, stood up again, and began to pace the length of the large, raw brick room. The tape recorder was in her hand. She pressed the Start button with her thumb. She inhaled the smoke and let it out slowly, "Ahhhh," she said. "Say, ahhhh, sweets."

After a time, she crossed to the bed again and flipped open her purse and took out the poem pages. The tape recorder was beside her on the chocolate brown St. Laurent throw. She heard Obecny's voice and then Emily's; the big ugly dangerous man and his victim, the terrified girl. She held the pages of her love poem to her breast. She listened, appalled and

excited. She shut her eyes and rocked back and forth, mouthing the words she'd already memorized:

"You yell . . . the knife goes down your throat . . . you understand? I want to hear it. Now, open your mouth. Say Ahhh. Say it! Ahhhh. Say ahhhhh."

She rewound the tape and started it again. To the accompaniment of the rape, against the voices, the music, of sex and suffering, she began to read her poem: "It was winter when our love began," she recited passionately. "And it was a fire made to keep away the cold . . . " She crumpled the pages suddenly, forcefully, and shut off the miniature machine. "I hate it," she said. "It's not right. I have so much to say, so much to give."

She tossed the crumpled paper ball at the window where the telescope was set up. She wanted desperately to return to the window; to watch again . . . no matter how severe the pain. She longed to reach with her arms, the way the telescope allowed her to reach with her eyes, into Emily's warm private world.

Andrea lay back on the bed. She was glad that she'd only read the poem to Dr. Marin. He'd tried to get more from her, but she'd realized that he was not on her side. He seemed more disturbed than happy for her. He didn't want her to love. That had been a lie.

Liar, liar, dip your nose in fire. Fire. How she wished she could fire Dr. Marin. Fire him. A fire made to keep away the cold. He was cold. He was as cold as his real employer, his true friend, Jules Glassen.

Perhaps she could, she thought suddenly. Perhaps there was someone to help her fire Dr. Marin. The cabdriver. She could arrange it. She hadn't liked his call; she didn't like being threatened by the crude animal, but he'd been, and he could still be, useful. The money meant nothing. He'd told her that bail had been set at $5,000. Nothing. And, when she'd

protested about protecting her identity, he'd told her exactly how to do it.

Find someone, anyone, right off the street, he told her. Give them the cash. Cash greased all the wheels all the time. With cash, there'd be no questions, no collateral crap, just a simple exchange—Lawrence Obecny for five thousand in cash. She could tip some chump a hundred to spring him. Let the guy say he was Obecny's brother or father or his mother, for that matter. Better still, find a chick. Get some junky chick who'd claim she was his woman or something. No one would give a damn. Just get five thousand dollars over to the county clerk's office and get him the hell out . . . fast!

Chapter 13

Andrea got up. Her coat was on a hook near the little efficiency kitchen she'd cleaned as best she could. She grabbed the coat and scrambled into it on her way down the stairs. It was freezing in the hallway; colder still outside with the wind swooping off the river and nothing to block it but the low-lying barracks and storage sheds of the fenced-in shipyard across the way. She slammed the door of the Jaguar and sat, smoking and shivering for some time. Then she ground out her second cigarette, put the car in gear and began to thread through the deserted waterfront streets.

There were a few bars in the neighborhood. A couple of run-down places that serviced the dock workers and one, recently restored to its turn-of-the-century grandeur, that catered to a growing new clientele—artists and young middle-income families who were moving from Manhattan's Soho and Tribeca to the cheaper, larger lofts across the bridge. The resurrected bar looked bright and cheerful, but nearly

empty. The weather seemed to be keeping all but the most dedicated drinkers at home tonight.

Some blocks away, there was a tavern with portholes in place of windows. The bar occupied the ground floor of a narrow corner building. The top three floors belonged to a transients' hotel. A sign, illuminated by a dim flourescent light, swung on creaking hinges in the wind. Rooms to Let—Daily, Weekly, Monthly Rates. The hotel entrance was a tiled doorway around the corner from the bar. Andrea glanced at it as she drove past.

Up ahead, a big car with New Jersey plates slowed to a stop. A girl, wearing a short rabbit-skin coat, high boots and a dark tam, hurried from a doorway to the curb to talk with the driver. Andrea drove past the idling car. The girl in the tam had big dark eyes. They struggled briefly to see beyond the Jaguar's headlights, then returned to the Jersey driver. Before Andrea had reached the corner, the girl had gotten into the big car and was being driven away.

A number of other girls were huddled in doorways or tight against the bleak building walls. They would venture to the curb when a passing car slowed to signal interest. They negotiated through car windows, hopping from one foot to the other to stave off the chill that bit through their flimsy coats and jackets. Andrea did not slow down. She circled the area and returned, parking a block away from the hotel. She lit another cigarette and sat in the dark watching the prostitutes.

Two more cars cruised the street and stopped. Two more girls negotiated at the curb, then got into the cars and drove off. After a while, the New Jersey car returned and the girl with the big dark eyes, and the hat like Emily's, got out. Andrea started up the Jaguar's motor, turned the headlights on high beam, and moved slowly toward her. The girl was talking to another; a heavy-set young whore whose bare pink flesh over-

lapped the tops of her tight patent leather boots. When the Jaguar stopped near them, it was the heavy-set whore who came to the car window.

"Want a date?"

"Tell your friend to get in."

The big girl stared hard at Andrea. Then she smiled. "She don't go for your type of thing. But I can maybe help you out."

"Send her over."

The girl shook her head. "Okay, but don't say I didn't tell you." She ambled back to the doorway where the other girl was waiting and delivered the message. The girl in the tam bent down and tried to see into the car from the sidewalk. Finally, she walked over to the Jaguar and looked inside. "Didn't she tell you?"

"Get in," Andrea said. The girl glanced over her shoulder, shrugged, and got into the car.

They rode in silence. After a while, the girl pulled off her tam and ran her hand through her hair. Her hair was dark and straight. "What'd you have in mind?" she asked. She was wearing a short skirt. She slid it back to reveal her bare thighs. "She told you I don't do chicks, didn't she?"

Andrea nodded.

"So . . . what do you want? You want to do me? I can handle that." She took one of Andrea's hands from the steering wheel and placed in on the inside of her thigh. She was naked under her short skirt. Andrea pulled her hand away.

"I think you better take me back there," the girl said. She seemed confused suddenly, vulnerable.

"I need your help," Andrea said.

"Hey, listen . . . you want something I can do for you, fine. We could try to work it out. You want company, someone just to talk to, a little kiss or something, I got to see some money right now. Up front."

Andrea stopped the car. The street was very dark and still. There were nothing but commercial buildings and loading docks visible and only one street lamp that looked cold and faraway. "I've got money. Plenty of it. I need you to . . . help me out."

"Let me have . . . twenty-five now. Then we'll talk."

Andrea counted out fifty dollars and handed it to the girl. "I need a favor. You won't get in any trouble, I promise you. It's easy. And there's another fifty dollars in it for you."

The girl stared at her wide-eyed. Then she laughed. "What Teresa told you—that fat hooker back there—what she said about me and women . . . it's mostly true. Mostly. But, once in a while . . ." She had put her arm around the back of Andrea's seat. Now, she touched her neck. The girl put her thin cold hand inside Andrea's coat collar and lifted her tossled honey-colored hair and stroked the nape of her neck gently.

"Don't," Andrea said softly.

The girl reached over and touched her face. She ran her fingers down Andrea's cheek and then, holding her lightly by the nape of the neck, she rubbed one finger back and forth over Andrea's lips. Then she leaned forward and kissed her.

"Please," Andrea said. "Please don't. I . . . what I want from you . . . it's not this."

"Teresa doesn't know shit. She don't understand anything. It's okay if you want me to. Honest. Sometimes I don't mind. Sometimes I like it, you know."

Andrea closed her eyes. The girl kissed her on the lips again, less gently. She felt her lips being pried open by the girl's insistent tongue. She felt the girl's hands toying with her coat buttons, tugging at them, and then, finally, giving up. The girl took Andrea's hand again and pushed it between her bare thighs and closed them tightly.

Andrea pulled back abruptly. "Stop it! I can't . . . don't you understand. I . . . I'm in love with someone. I . . . this isn't right. This isn't what I want. I've waited for such a long time. This is not what I want!"

The girl opened her thighs and lifted Andrea's hand and kissed her palm. Then she laughed. "Okay. I understand. It's okay, honest. Don't you worry about it. You'll be okay—you and your girl. You'll both be okay. What do you want from me? Just tell me."

"Tomorrow morning," Andrea said. "I'll need you tomorrow morning. Where will you be?"

"You were serious about the fifty bucks?"

Andrea nodded, yes.

"I'll be wherever you want me to be."

"Thank you," Andrea said.

Paul Henreid lit two cigarettes. He took one of them from between his lips and handed it to Bette Davis.

"Will you be happy?" he asked her.

"Oh, Jerry," Davis breathed, "we have the moon. Let's not ask for the stars."

The music came up strong as an embrace between them. It drowned out the snuffling of Emily's tears. She stood and arched her back and stretched. Then she turned on the overhead light.

"God, I never wanted to smoke a cigarette so bad," Luffrono said, standing too.

She laughed. "Me, too. I'm proud of myself, I only cried once."

"You cried three times."

"I did?" She shut off the television set. "You cried once."

Luffrono walked over to the window. "I cried twice, but don't tell anybody. Great movie. I love old movies."

"Do you?"

He turned and grinned at her. There was a curtain rod over the window; the sort that worked pulley-style. Luffrono toyed with the cord and the empty plastic hooks slid back and forth across the rod.

"I haven't gotten the curtains yet." She joined him at the window. "I hope . . . I hope you liked the chicken."

"The chicken was terrific." He took a step toward her but she moved away. He tilted his head and studied her face. Her dark eyes were warm and bright. He'd wanted to reach out and touch the side of her face, the little lines that ran from the corners of her big, dark eyes toward her temples and disappeared beneath her thick straight hair. Her cheeks flushed suddenly under his gaze.

"You have to go."

"Yeah," he said without moving. "I have to go." He kept looking at her until, finally, she turned her head. Then he was sorry. He hadn't wanted to stare her down or embarrass her. He'd just been stroking her face. He'd been running his eyes over her face, anyway, trying to imagine how warm her pink cheeks would probably feel, and how smooth that temple where her smile lines hid. He clapped his hands together now. "Right. Next time dinner's on me, okay?"

He walked past her and got his jacket from the back of one of the wooden chairs and put it on. "My coat?"

"Oh sure," Emily said. She touched her cheek without thinking, then pulled her hand away, embarrassed. "I'll get it."

His overcoat was in the closet. She gave it to him and took the woolen scarf off the hanger and held it until he'd slipped into his coat. "My niece . . ." he said, putting the scarf on. He tucked both ends of it into the front of his coat. "A Christmas gift, you know."

She nodded.

"Well . . ." He was at the door. "I guess . . . Listen, I'll give you a call."

"Will you?"

That made him smile. He ran his fingers through his hair and smiled happily at her. "Uh-huh. Count on it."

"Goodnight."

"Night, Emily . . . and . . . thanks."

She looked right up at his face, then lowered her head so that she seemed to be smiling at his dumb scarf. "Goodnight . . . Bob."

She closed the door after him. She locked the door and put the metal chain in place and then she leaned against the door and stared out toward the window. Jenny moseyed over. The little cat rubbed itself against her leg and Emily lifted her.

"Bob," she whispered to Jenny, "there's something I have to say. Please listen . . . this isn't easy for me . . . but I want to be fair. To both of us . . ."

Jenny meowed and Emily set her down. "Things getting a little too tight for you, Bob?" she teased the cat.

She walked toward the window. Jenny hopped up onto the sill and Emily petted her absentmindedly. "Maybe it's because I'm lonely. I know I'm lonely and . . . I like you. That frightens me . . . " She looked out at the other side of the river. "This isn't at all the way I wanted to say it . . . not at all . . . I am making a fool of myself, aren't I?"

Jenny jumped down and circled Emily's feet, rubbing against them affectionately again.

Emily looked at the little cat. Then she looked up and wrapped her arms around herself and stared out at the bridge. She wondered if she could recognize his car when it passed. For goodness sakes, she thought, sighing, I don't even know what his car looks like.

"Oh, Bob . . . " She hugged herself, melodramatically, then let her hands fall to her sides. "Oh shit," she said. And it occurred to her that if she did know what kind of car Luffrono drove, and if she could pick it out on the bridge, then so could he turn and see her standing by the window like a perfect fool. No, she thought, hurrying away from the curtainless glass, not a perfect fool . . . nobody's perfect.

Andrea phoned the next morning. "Hi. Are you all right?"

"Yes, of course," Emily said, surprised at the breathless concern in Andrea's voice. "Are you? You sound . . . upset."

"No. No, I'm fine. I've just got this teensy hangover. Are we lunching today?"

"Sure."

"Grand. I've got a few errands and then . . . how 'bout I pick you up at the museum?"

"Can you make it a little early? Eleven-thirty or so? I've got a class due at two and I'll need a little preparation time before they arrive."

Andrea hesitated. "Well . . . Sure. Fine. I've got to check with Dr. Marin. Just to see if I can move my appointment back a bit. I'm sure it'll be fine. If I don't call you again, we're on, okay?"

"Okay. See you later . . . unless another day would be more convenient."

"No. Today. Please . . . Did you have a nice evening?"

Steven walked past the alcove where Emily had taken the call. "Very nice," she said less enthusiastically than she might have if he hadn't wandered by just then. "Hi," she said to him. He looked at his watch and looked back at her. "What made you ask?" she said to Andrea. Steven sighed and went into the office. "About last night, I mean."

"I miss you," Andrea said. Then she gave a throaty chuckle. "It's probably just the rolls that I miss. Listen, hon, my dime's running out. See you later."

Emily hung up the phone and hurried down to the children congregated around the whale bone. "Jim Deats, you get down from there. Ada, this is a museum. Don't touch!" One of the parents who'd accompanied the class on its outing was scolding two of the kids who'd sidled closer to the bone and were examining it with unabandoned delight.

"Mrs. Fenneral, this is a kid's museum," the girl named Ada told her.

"It's a participation place. Mr. Diamond said so."

Emily smiled at the flustered woman. "It's true," she said softly. "We encourage the children to use all their senses in exploring this environment. In fact, we encourage everyone to try it. Would you like to see what it feels like? Here."

Mrs. Fenneral touched the bone tentatively. "Ooooo, I'm going to tell Mr. Diamond on you," an uninitiated child threatened her. She drew back, instinctively. Then she laughed.

"Times sure have changed."

"They're changing all the time," Emily said happily.

At eleven-fifteen, as she ushered the last of the class through the People Tube to the front door, she noticed Steven watching her from the balcony near the administrative offices.

"Emily . . . a minute, please," he called when the group had gone.

She walked over to the balcony and stood on the first step looking up at him.

"Emily, uh, could we have lunch today or are you eating alone?"

She wondered if he was aware of the assumption

implicit in the question: That there were only two choices—alone or with Steven. "I'm having lunch with a friend."

"Him?"

Emily's heart began to beat rapidly. It took her a moment to realize that he was not talking about Luffrono. Of course not. Steven didn't know anything about the detective. It was the mythical Him—the culprit who'd destroyed their marriage, who'd stolen her away from Steven, who'd . . . God only knew with what powers Steven had invested his invented competitor. He saw the impatience, the annoyance on her face.

"I'm sorry," he said quickly.

"Well stop . . . Stop being so sorry. Do something with yourself! Find yourself a girl . . . "

"Emily," he said, shocked, "*have* you found someone new?"

She sighed. "Oh, Steven . . . don't. Steven, *if* you were an idiot, I could understand all this . . ." Andrea appeared at the end of the big neon-lined tube. "Hi," Emily called to her.

Andrea crossed to the stairs. She looked neat, expensively well-groomed as ever, but the "teensy" hangover seemed to have taken its toll. She smiled with honest pleasure when she saw Emily. She waved and smiled, but there was something off, something not quite as ebullient in her eyes as in her smile or the wave or the handshake she offered Steven when Emily introduced them.

"Andrea, this is my ex-husband, Steven. Steven, Andrea Glassen."

"I was just trying to get her back," he said.

Emily's shoulders slumped. She was grateful when she heard Millie calling her. "Give me a second, I have to see someone," she told Andrea.

"Sure, hon."

They watched her hurrying over to Millie. "She always leaves me," Steven said.

Andrea drew a cigarette from the pack in her purse. "Oh?" She raised her eyebrows. "How come?" She held the unlit cigarette to her mouth.

Steven colored. He dug into his pockets for a light. "That's a strange question," he said.

He drew out a book of matches. Andrea took them from his hands. "Direct question." She lit her own cigarette and tossed the match book into her purse.

"Well," Steven began reluctantly. He looked from the purse, which Andrea folded shut and tucked back under her arm, to her strangely riveting eyes. "Uh, it's very complex . . . "

"Complex?" She blew a smoke ring which hovered like a halo above his head.

"Emily doesn't really . . . " Steven coughed meagerly. It was something between a clearing of his throat and a cough. "I'm sorry. There's no smoking here."

"Oh." Andrea wet her fingers and pinched the lit end of the cigarette gingerly until it fizzled out. "You were saying?"

"Oh, yes . . . that she, Emily, my wife . . . she doesn't really know what she needs. . . . "

Andrea smiled again, a thin-lipped smile that left the rest of her face static and waiting.

"She needs a . . . a kind of careful concerned love . . . that respects her."

"What happened in the bedroom?"

"The bedroom . . . ?" Steven was quietly aghast. "Why nothing."

Andrea laughed, delighted. Emily joined them again before Steven could amend his response. "Sorry about that. Let's have lunch."

"Uh, it's been a pleasure to meet you," Steven

said. His fair complexion was mottled with pink. He tossed his hair back and pushed up his glasses and hurried up the steps, away from them.

Andrea took Emily's arm. "Why don't we get out of here," she suggested.

"Oh, sure. I just have to get my coat." Emily noticed the odd grin on Andrea's face. "Is something wrong?"

"Nothing. Absolutely nothing."

Chapter 14

She sat in Dr. Marin's waiting room. Her gold pencil was poised above the tiny matching gold memo pad she held. Facing her was the list of today's appointments. She crossed off "Lunch with E." The telephone man was due at the loft between four and six. If everything went as planned, Obecny would show up for his money shortly thereafter. Andrea drew a line through the second item on the agenda: "Marin." Then she took the rough copy of her poem out of her purse and began to re-write it, neatly, on a fresh page of the memo pad.

It was winter when our love began,
And it was a fire made to keep away the cold,
To light the winter's night
And my heart with gold.
Oh burn, my winter fire,
My precious midnight sun . . .

That was as far as she'd gotten. She tapped the lead pencil against her chin and studied the verse. Dr. Marin's door opened. "Andrea."

She entered his office. She was still holding the memo pad and the pencil when she took her seat. She thought that maybe she would give Marin another chance. Lunch with Emily had been wonderful and reassuring. Yes, the detective had dropped by last night to help her celebrate Obecny's arrest. Emily described the cab ride and the chaotic street scene that followed with naive enthusiasm.

"And you were in his cab, too," she'd told Andrea. Her concern was touching. "You could have been hurt, too. It was awful. He was awful. I get chills just thinking about what might have happened to you . . . or to me again. But it's over, thank God. And here we are safe and sound."

Bob—Emily called him Bob—had merely had dinner with her and, after that, they'd watched a TV movie together. That was all there was to it. The lights had been lowered for the TV movie. The man had probably just taken his jacket off, nothing more.

So Andrea felt happy and generous. She faced Dr. Marin and said, "It was more than just this one poem that I wanted to share with you yesterday. I wanted you to know that I am in love."

"Oh?"

"It's complicated now. But I'm very happy, Dr. Marin."

"Why is that?"

"Why? Why?" Andrea shut the memo pad abruptly. "Why is what? Why am I in love? Why am I happy?"

"Let's stay with your poetry for a minute, shall we? Andrea, your poems are very sensuous, very . . . passionate. But it's very important that you make a clear distinction between what should happen and

what truly is happening. Now, as for your being 'in love' . . . Is this in reference to one of your poems?"

Her hands tightened on the arms of her chair. The memo pad lay in her lap. She stared down at it, fighting to maintain some control over herself. She saw a distorted reflection of her face in the small polished gold top of the pad. She looked hurt. She felt angry.

"Does it make a difference?" she asked, tightly. "Don't you think it does?"

"No."

"Is something actually happening?"

"Yes."

"Or is it something you wish to have happen?"

"I know what I want," she snapped.

"Do you mean in the poetic sense?"

". . . and I know how to get it." Her voice softened as she finished the sentence.

Dr. Marin leaned back in his leather chair. He stared at her thoughtfully. "Andrea . . . have you said how you feel?"

She remembered how difficult it had been just to say I miss you, on the phone this morning; and how she'd had to make a joke about it immediately afterward. "No!" she said somewhat defensively to Marin. "Not yet," she added more quietly. "I can't yet. But I will."

"You will, though? You're certain you will?"

"Yes." She was angry with him again. "Why do you insist that I won't?"

"Andrea, it's very important that you make a clear distinction between what *should* happen, and what truly is happening. Now . . . is there a love here as you describe? Or is this a love you desire . . . ?"

"It is," she cut him off defiantly. "Why do you say it isn't?"

She was fuming when the session ended. She left Dr. Marin's office and took a cab to her home and

then packed a little overnight bag which she tossed into the well of the Jaguar. She ran back into the house and poured herself a tall scotch with only what water might drain from the melting ice cubes to dilute it. It was her third scotch of the day. Two at lunch with Emily. One tall, fast one now. At the last minute, with her coat and gloves already on, she decided to take what was left of the quart of Chivas with her. She grabbed the bottle and got into the Jaguar and drove, recklessly, to the warehouse on River Street.

The telephone man was leaving a card in the door when Andrea arrived. "Nice timing," he said, tearing up the card. She led him upstairs. When he'd finished installing the phone, she gave him a shot of Chivas and a five-dollar tip. The bell downstairs rang as she was ushering him out. She excused herself, said "Goodbye. Thanks." And went to the window that faced the front of the building.

Obecny was standing on the wrought iron steps. Andrea scanned the street. As she had hoped, his cab was nowhere in sight. They'd probably already assigned it to another driver. He had an arrest record now. She doubted that cab companies were permitted to hire known criminals . . . or rape suspects. She was in a foul mood. Seeing him, looking down at his greasy hair and the ears, red from the cold, jutting through the matted mess; seeing his bandaged hand. Just seeing him irritated her much more than she'd imagined it would. She walked to the intercom and buzzed him in. Then she poured herself another scotch.

"Who was that?" he said by way of greeting.

Andrea sat down on her bed and crossed her legs and regarded him icily over the rim of her glass. "Who was whom?" she said after he'd shifted his weight from one foot to the other for the dozenth time.

"The guy. Downstairs. The one with the tool box? Looked like a telephone repair guy."

"He was a telephone repair guy—"

"Oh. Right. So . . . ?"

"The money?"

Obecny's thick lips spread in a sly grin. Even in the icy weather, his pocked face shone with sweat. His complexion was blotched and purple, glistening hideously.

"Yeah, the money. Five grand."

"One. I told her to tell you one thousand."

He smelled. He stunk. Andrea studied him and, unexpectedly, she felt nausea welling up in her . . . and tears. Obecny was tall and big, but his weight was grotesquely distributed. His shoulders were wide but slumped forward. Beneath his belt, a belt too tight for his loose and unlaundered corduroy pants, a flaccid-looking pot belly pushed forward. He wasn't the sort that exercised. His muscles were toned by anger, hatred, frustration. Flabby muscles that tightened in rage and would fail him otherwise.

Her tears, she knew, came from the thought of him with Emily. That face leering down at the terrified girl. That pallid, flabby flesh; those filthy hands pawing at her. Andrea was appalled. Until now, until just now, she had not realized how much Emily must have suffered.

The cabdriver laughed. "It's . . . whaddya call it . . . the cost of living, you understand? Yeah, the cost of living has gone up."

"I paid five thousand dollars for your bail . . . And I had to pay the girl . . ."

"Yeah. Where'd you find her?"

She stared at him. She loathed him. Her eyes which had grown misty thinking of Emily, tearful with regret, now sparked with fiery hatred. She smiled her

thin-lipped smile. "She's a social worker. She gets paid to help social misfits like yourself."

"Hey! You watch it now. I did everything you asked and I did it good, too. Didn't I? Well, didn't I? I saw you in the mirror. I saw you listening to that tape. You were getting off on it. Don't you be calling me a . . . a . . . social misfit, like. It was you told me how to do it." He pulled a switchblade knife from his back pocket and waved it at her. "The knife in the mouth . . . everything . . . I did it right!"

Andrea held out her hand. "Let me see it. Is that the same knife you used?"

He relaxed and grinned again. "Yeah." He pressed the release and the blade sprung open. "Where you want it? You want to taste it like she did?"

"Give it to me," she repeated.

He did. He handed the knife to her. "Nice, ain't it? Feels good, don't it? You like knives? I can get you a real good one . . . you want?"

"I'll keep this one."

"Like hell you will, lady!"

"I'll pay you for it."

"Oh . . . well, now, that's different. How about some of that booze? Then we'll talk terms."

"There are no terms . . . except mine. You accepted my offer—bail plus one thousand dollars. There's a chance to *earn* more, however . . . "

He seemed not to have heard the last line. "Hey, I've got to split, you know. Where am I going to go? How far you figure a grand'll get me? To Staten Island, maybe?"

"I may have another job for you." She refilled the scotch and handed him the glass.

Obecny drank it down greedily. "Hey, I don't want no more jobs from you. I don't need no more. Sweetheart, face it, I got you by the short hairs."

"What did you say?"

He dropped to his knees in front of her. He put his hands on her legs. "The short hairs, sweets. And I don't need, don't want, no more *jobs* from you. You just give me the money, you hear me. You give it . . . or get it if you don't have it on you . . . Get it fast, too. If I go back inside, inside that joint, that prick prison, I'm going to make sure they reserve a room for you there, too."

He tightened his grip on her knees. His thumb nails dug into her. Andrea stared down at his bandaged hand. She felt her own hand weighing the knife he'd given her; felt her fist closing on the knife. She could plunge it into his broken hand. She could drive it through the bandages, through the bruised flesh and splintered bones, up to the hilt.

"What do you want?" she said.

He stroked her leg. He laid his face on her thigh and rubbed his cheek against her. "I want . . . a couple of things." She tried to stand, but Obecny pushed down on her thighs. His head was in her lap. She could see the nape of his neck, the thin stringy hair laying over his jacket collar. She could feel his warm breath through her clothes. "Money. The tape. That's it. Then I split. You never see me again. The cops never see me again. Five thou . . . and that tape I made with that hot chick. . . . "

"That's impossible."

"What are you crazy? Nothing's impossible. But I understand you. You know, when you told me what I had to do that first time—you know, get it on with someone I didn't even know . . . get it up, just like that . . . shit, I said to myself, that's impossible. Yeah. I said it, too. Just like you. But I did it, didn't I?" He lifted his head and looked up at her face. "Awwww, smile, sweets. You heard that tape. You know I must be good. Was she moaning? Did she do what I told her? Nothing's impossible. You'll see."

"Let me get up." Andrea's voice was husky but even. Obecny stared at her suspiciously. "I've got to get the money," she said.

"And the tape."

"I . . . don't have it with me."

"You got the recorder?"

"Why?"

"We'll make one. You and me. We'll make a tape."

"Let me up."

"You got it? The recorder?"

"Yes."

He fell back and poured himself another drink. Andrea stood up. She closed the knife quietly and palmed it. "It's downstairs. The tape recorder. On the third floor."

"Get it."

"Do you trust me? What if I run away?"

He smiled and toasted her with the scotch. Then he drank it down. "You're hot, aren't you? I had you figured wrong. I had you figured for a lez, you know. For some kind of jealous lezzy whose girlfriend did her wrong or something. But you're hot. Whaddya want? You want me to go downstairs with you? You want to make it downstairs?"

"Yes," Andrea said.

There was a tool shed on the third floor, a metal closet, with a padlocked door. Andrea had explored it a week ago. When she couldn't find the key, she had broken the rusted padlock with a crowbar that had been lying outside the shed. She still had the front door padlock in her purse, however . . . It would do . . . "Let me get the money," she said to Obecny. She got her handbag, opened it and slipped the padlock into her pocket along with the knife.

"Before we go," she said, "tell me about . . . her.

About Emily, the girl on the tape. Tell me what it felt like."

"Tell you? I'm going to show you, sweets. You got that knife? You just give me the knife and I'll show you how Lawrence Obecny made that little girl squirm."

"Of course, Lawrence. We'll go downstairs now. Then I'll give you the knife."

All the way to Emily's apartment, Luffrono kept trying to figure out some way to tell her that Lawrence Obecny was free. He couldn't find the way, the words. He was afraid that she might hold him personally responsible. He did. He was afraid that she'd never trust him again. He couldn't stand the thought of that, or of seeing her terrified again as she'd been after the rape and, again, after the creep had tried to break into her place a second time.

How could he explain how stunned he himself had been when Swid told him? Who would have figured that a degenerate creep like that could have made bail overnight? At least he wouldn't know her whereabouts. "You've moved. He couldn't possibly know your new address, could he?"

Luffrono parked his car and walked the two blocks to Bridge Towers. Bottom line, he thought, there was nothing he could say. Somehow—though God knew he still wasn't sure how—he'd blown it. But somehow, though God only knew how, he'd nail the bastard still.

He gave his name to the doorman who rang Emily on the intercom and asked if she was expecting a Bob Luffrono. Yes, she'd said, and the doorman had let him in. That made him feel a little better. He thought briefly of mentioning something to the guy. But what? Hey, listen, could you check out any weird-looking assholes who come by looking for her . . . ?

Could you make sure they're who they say they are . . . ? The doorman would take him for a jealous suitor trying to hold down the competition unless, of course, Luffrono flashed his badge at him.

Then what? Tell the guy that Emily Hollender had been raped? That there was this creep on the loose who might try to get at her again. Beans! Just what she'd need, to have a nervous doorman looking fishy at her every time she walked in or out. Nope. There was nothing to do now but get the guy when his case came up and get him good.

Tonight, Bob Luffrono had a date with Emily Hollender. And Lawrence Obecny was definitely not invited along. Forget it, Luffrono told himself, stepping off the elevator. For one night, let the kid relax. He rang Emily's bell and it occurred to him that he wasn't sure which kid he'd meant—Bob or Emily.

"Hi. You're late."

"Hiya. You look great. How late am I?"

"Not very. Want a drink? Oh . . . I don't know if I've got any wine left."

"How about just grabbing your coat and we'll get a drink at the restaurant?"

"Okay," she said, and let the door close in his face. She was back in a minute with her coat dangling by one sleeve behind her. Her face was red. "Gosh, I'm sorry. That was *so* stupid."

He helped her on with the coat. "It's okay. Got your keys?" He had his foot in the door this time.

"Yes."

He took his foot out of the door and let it shut again. She double-locked it. In that second, he almost told her about Obecny. Then she turned and smiled up at him and her smile was so happy and confident that all he could do was take her arm and lead her to the elevator and smile back like a goon. Not tonight, creep, he warned the sick cabdriver. You get in the way to-

night, and I'll put you away for the rest of your life. Bob Luffrono has a date with Emily Hollender tonight and Lawrence Obecny is definitely not invited along.

"Where are we going?" she asked as he started up the car.

"There's a restaurant just over the bridge. River Cafe—ever hear of it?"

"Oh, yes," Emily said. "I've always wanted to . . ."

"Me, too. But I never . . ."

"Yes. I know. Me, neither, but . . ."

They laughed.

They laughed during dinner, too, and it astounded him. He felt as though one Robert Luffrono was sitting across a candle-lit table staring through a bunch of flowers at this dewy-eyed creature, this giggling Bambi of a girl who seemed to like him very much or, at least, liked his stories, found him—or them . . . or maybe it was the wine—sparkling and witty. And another Robert Luffrono was watching from Cloud Nine, just laying back with this big grin that stretched not from ear to ear, but across the whole length of the impossibly beautiful barge-restaurant, watching, grinning and not quite believing that a couple of glasses of wine could make him feel so warm and witty and in love. "Oh God," he gasped.

"What's wrong?"

He coughed. What else was he going to do? He couldn't say, Oh God, I haven't felt this good since MaryAnne Colleccio decided that, under very special circumstances—like if you really loved someone and knew that you were going to marry them—God would probably grant you a special dispensation for going all the way; especially if it was summer and your parents were away for the weekend and you'd already made a deal with Him (God, not the guy) about wearing a diaphragm anyway.

"Are you all right?" Emily looked concerned. She

leaned forward and took his hand. Her eyes were glowing in the candlelight. He made the mistake of looking down at her hand resting on his and she slid it off and put it back on her lap, out of sight.

"The soup," he said. "I . . . uh, never tried turtle soup before."

"Me neither. What's it like?"

"Ever hold a turtle in your palm? You know, those little ones they used to sell in pet shops. Well, it tastes sort of the way they used to feel clawing and crawling across your palm."

"Oh God," Emily said. And they laughed again.

It was dusk when they left the restaurant. There was a little park across from the gravel driveway where Luffrono's car waited. They walked in the park which was starkly architectural-looking. Geometric blocks of concrete were bridged by benches made of slatted two-by-fours. Bare young trees sprouted, stretched, in dark silhouettes from squares of frozen earth. The setting sun cast theatrical shadows onto the bare walkways which flamed with a deceptive warmth, golden and rosy, beneath their feet.

They walked, keeping a distance between them, an invisible arm's length which was both tantalizing and satisfying. It allowed them to look at one another. It let them turn toward and away from the growing intensity that had begun to tug at them.

Luffrono's thick hair was windblown. It seemed to lean, to yearn, as did the whole of his craggy face, toward Emily. His hair blew forward like a visor shading his blue wind-stung eyes and lashing, occasionally, at the bridge of his large nose which was burnished by the weather and the fading red light of day. Emily's dark hair was tucked into her thick knit tam. The collar of her black coat was turned up, its winged edges, like Luffrono's hair and nose and strong chin, seemed to be reaching out, trying secretly to span the space

that kept them safe. Her nose, a mere burr of jutting bone and wind-burned flesh, her red cheekbones and laughing lips, all turned to him in the fading light.

"Dinner was great."

His hands were stuck in the pockets of his overcoat, clenched securely, lest they fumble suddenly for her, frighten her and him and the moment away. "It wasn't bad, but that's the last turtle soup I'll ever eat. Do you still want to walk over the bridge?"

It looked very near to them in the clear evening. The bridge was a massive, magical arch strung with lights; a steel carpet unrolling wondrously, ceremoniously, toward the city. "It's so beautiful," Emily said, staring up at it.

"Yeah, it sure is." He felt giddy, high. The forbidding distance and the cold, all obstacles seemed surmountable. He glanced at his car which was parked behind them, near the restaurant. An attendant was directing traffic which consisted of an impressive maroon limousine, a gray Rolls, and a sporting little twenty-five-thousand dollar car with a name that was longer than its body was high. Luffrono figured that his "company car," the stalwart Chrysler with scrapes along one side of it that were as close to racing stripes as he'd probably ever get, was in good company. He could grab a cab and pick it up later, on his way home.

"Let's try it," he said. Oh, he felt jaunty all right. Nevermind that he got breathless watching the joggers run the length of the promenade each morning. Right now, he was Bob Luffrono, one hell of an adventurous son of a gun; a sport, for Christ sake. "Sure," he said. "Looks like fun."

Was he crazy? Totally out of his mind? It was all of fifteen degrees out on level ground. It must have been fifteen below trudging so high above the East River that if your frozen leg cracked off like an icicle and fell in, you wouldn't hear the splash till next week.

But he was grinning. Or maybe his lips were stuck, blown back by the icy wind, pressed flat forever like a prom souvenir.

"You mean you're a Brooklyn cop and you've never been on the Brooklyn Bridge?" Emily wanted to know.

"Never on foot . . . and never in February."

"People said this bridge could never be built."

"We'd better walk a little faster."

She returned his grin and picked up the pace a little. He was grateful for both, and warmer. "There's a plaque up here," she said. Each word was wrapped in its own steamy cloud. " 'Dedicated to the memory of Emily Warren Roebling, whose patience and courage helped her stricken husband complete the construction of this bridge from the plan of his father John—who gave his life to the Brooklyn Bridge.' " She tucked her arm into his and they walked together, huddled against the cold.

"I could see that," Luffrono mumbled. "You could give your life to a bridge like this . . . especially on a night like this."

Emily laughed little clouds. "It also says, 'Back of every great work we can find the self-sacrificing devotion of a woman . . . ' "

"Sure. I could see that, too. There's a lot of romance in this bridge. . . . "

"It was finished in the spring of 1883."

He shook his head. "She must have really been something."

"God, the city looks miles away."

It looked a lot closer than it had before she'd taken his arm, he thought. "We'll get there."

Gus was on duty in the lobby. Luffrono was glad someone was there to open the door. He wasn't sure his frozen fingers could bend to the task. He did manage to press the elevator button. Then he blew into his

hands and rubbed them together. Emily had her gloved fingers over her nose and mouth. She was breathing into them, too. Her nose, chin and cheeks were still wind-burned when the elevator stopped at the sixth floor.

"Well, thanks very much for dinner." She smiled and, if his hands hadn't been so damned cold, he'd have touched those little lines on her temple. He'd have found a way to do it somehow. Instead, he looked at his watch.

"It's early."

Her eyes were all shiny again, the sting of the cold was melting out of them. She looked up at him with those melting eyes and she nodded her head. "Yes. It is."

The doors opened. Luffrono waited, allowing her to precede him out of the elevator. She did and then, to his surprise, she turned and he found himself stopped in the elevator doorway. Her face had turned serious again, all but her eyes. "Bob, I . . ."

The doors released and began to close. He lifted his forearm and blocked them. They opened again, and he waited, patiently, he thought, for an explanation . . . for something.

"I . . . I have to try to be fair . . . to both of us."

He wished she could see her eyes. Then let her talk in that quavering grown-up voice about fair and unfair. The doors started to close again. Luffrono blocked them and, once more, they sprung open. "Fair?" he said taking a step toward her. The damn doors shoved shut again but, this time, they bumped him from behind, pushing him closer to Emily.

"By fair I mean . . . Oop . . . !" She put her hands in front of her, instinctively. He could have taken both her hands into one of his and pulled her against him. He might have, if the mayor of the sixth

floor hadn't suddenly appeared in the corridor. "Hi, Ida," Emily smiled at the staring woman.

A man's voice rang through the elevator shaft, from the floor below: "Hey . . . what about being fair to *me!*"

Surprised, they stepped aside and allowed the doors to close. "Hey," Luffrono said quietly. "Why don't you just invite me in for a cup of coffee and . . ." He turned his head slightly, just in case Ida Marx's eyesight was as keen as her hearing. She was still watching them . . . lip-reading, Luffrono suspected. "And don't worry about being fair. All right?"

"All right," Emily said.

"You're all right?"

"Yes, Ida. Thanks."

"All right." She re-entered her apartment and bolted the door as Emily unlocked hers.

Luffrono took off his coat. "This closet?"

"Fine. I'll get the coffee."

"Want to take your coat off first?"

She smiled wanly. He helped her off with her coat. "Gloves? Hat . . . ?" Then, seeing that she was truly nervous, he gave her a reassuring smile. "I was going to stop right there anyway. Just the coat, gloves and hat . . . "

She handed them to him and hurried into the kitchen. He was at the window when she came back out carrying an empty coffee can. "I'm all out . . . "

"Do you have any brandy?"

"Look, Bob, I . . . don't feel very well." She looked away from him, down at her feet, at the boots that were too warm for indoor wear.

He lifted her head with one hand, with a finger crooked under her chin. "What's the problem?"

"I don't know." She put the coffee can on the table and sat down. She touched her palms to her fore-

head. "I think I have a fever . . . I feel a slight headache. I'm coming down with something."

"A touch of the bridge?"

"Yes. Maybe. We'd better make it an early night, don't you think?"

"I suppose." He wanted to lift her head again, to have her looking at him. He thought that he would like her to see that he wasn't doing so well right now either. Her suggestion about making it an early night had gutted him. The strange empty feeling in the pit of his stomach was something new and something that he thought he could live without. But, he had to admit, that the newness of it and the intensity of the feeling, however rotten, was interesting . . . and he found that he liked the idea of it. Not the feeling; just the idea that he was feeling, that he was capable of feeling so hurt so fast. It was a little awesome.

He shrugged his shoulders and smiled. "Well . . . I'll stop off at that little bakery," he said, going for his coat. "They have great coffee."

When he turned back to her she was watching him, wide-eyed. "Are you going?"

"Yes, I guess so."

She stood and walked to the closet to help him with his coat. "I never get sick. It must have been the walk . . . the bridge. I've never felt this way before." He waited for her to get his coat. She did. She held it and lifted her face to him. "Would you feel my forehead?" she asked earnestly.

He thought he was smiling. He really didn't know. He touched her forehead with his hand and then with his lips the way his mother used to check for fever. Only his lips didn't feel very maternal.

"Have you figured me out yet, Luffrono?" She sort of whispered it into his collar bone.

"Yeah . . . You're afraid you're falling in love with me."

"It's . . . a lot more complicated than that." He recognized the sound her voice made. It sounded like the ache of sudden sadness he'd felt in the pit of his stomach. He held her shoulders and she looked up at him slowly. She was holding his coat in front of her, tightly, possessively.

"I know," he told her. "I'm falling in love with you."

"Oh no. Oh. I mean . . . Bob, this isn't easy for me. I want to be fair . . . to both of us. I'm not ready . . . I don't think I could . . . "

"Hey . . . " He said it very softly. "You don't have to worry."

"Maybe it's because I'm lonely. I know I'm lonely and I like you and that frightens me. . . . "

"We're in love, you know."

". . . and I wouldn't expect you to have to deal with that problem . . . " She'd slipped away from him and began to pace. He wasn't sure if she'd heard him.

"The problem of being in love?" he asked.

"This isn't at all the way I wanted to say this." Jenny strolled into the room from the kitchen. She looked up at Emily, circled her legs, then walked between them. The monologue had a familiar ring to it, she seemed to be saying. She plopped down under the table and yawned. "Not at all," Emily continued. "I'm making a fool of myself, aren't I?"

"Yeah. But I don't care."

She spun around and faced him. Her expression was a mask of confusion: sudden anger, embarrassment, despair. She sighed deeply. "Maybe I need more time. . . . "

He walked up to her. "How much time?"

"A lot."

He was staring at her. He looked at her for a long time and then he seemed to have made up his mind. "No," he said. "I need you . . . now."

She began to pace again. She was clinging to his coat, hugging it against her. "Maybe you should go . . . Maybe you should . . . Oh, Luffrono." She stopped and held the overcoat toward him. "Yes. You should."

He took the coat from her hands. He held it, trying to decide whether to put it on or not; trying to decide what would be best for her. His eyes were all concern, all love, looking at her.

"No," she whispered. "No, don't go, please." He smiled. He took her into his arms and even then he had to bend his head very close to hers to hear it: "I . . . I don't want to miss the one person . . . I could really love."

She was shaking in his arms. He wasn't sure whether she was crying or not. He just held her very closely and stroked her hair and kissed her temple, the place where her laugh lines disappeared. Her head felt warm and clean. Her skin and hair smelled of soap and had no taste but warmth and cleanliness. Warm against his warm lips, he held her; kissed her lightly again and again, each time finding a new warm place until she raised her face up to his and he found her lips which were warm and moist and waiting.

When the telephone rang, she was startled. They both were. His nose collided with her cheekbone and they laughed. "Hello?" she said, lifting the receiver. She shrugged at him. The laughter was still on her lips, but silent. "Hello? Who is it?—Hello?" When there was no response, she put her hand over the receiver. "No one's answering," she told him.

He took the phone and listened. Nothing. He began to shrug, too. Then, suddenly, a voice, deep, troubled, trembling, said: "You're touching her. Don't touch her."

"Who is it?" Emily asked.

He hung up. "It's nobody." He stared at the tele-

phone for a moment, baffled. Then, he glanced out the window. He stared hard, but there was nothing out there. Nothing but the bridge, the river, the Brooklyn waterfront, and the bleak night.

Chapter 15

The first thing she heard was a muffled rhythmic beeping. She opened her eyes slowly. The sun was up. It filtered through the matchstick blinds leaving a striped pattern across the bare floor of the loft and most of the bed. Andrea rolled over. Her cheek hit the telephone which was on the pillow next to hers. The receiver had fallen off. The spindly cord hung over the edge of the bed then disappeared in a tangle of brown velour.

Andrea groped for the receiver. The beeping sound helped her locate it. The receiver was sticky. She put it back on the cradle to silence it. Then she looked at her hand. For a moment, it was hard to tell whether the sunlight had made her palm and fingertips look reddish or whether the strange coloring had something to do with the sticky substance on the telephone receiver.

Suddenly, she remembered. She moaned. Her mouth opened and she filled it quickly with her fist. She

bit her fist to hold back the scream. The other hand she held far above her. She stared at it as if it didn't belong to her. She stretched her fingers wide, not wanting to feel the blood that stained them. With her hand still held as far from her body as she could manage, she rolled off the bed and box spring onto the crumpled heap of the velour spread on the floor.

The blood was Obecny's. She didn't want it on her hand. Naked, she walked to the bathroom trying to remember when she had torn off her soiled clothing. When was the last time she had been downstairs? After the telephone call to Emily, she remembered. Andrea washed her hands in the small enamel basin in the bathroom. She scoured her hands, using the coarse Lufa sponge to scrub away the blood stains. Then she staggered back to the bed.

There was still some scotch left in the bottle. She filled her mouth with it and swallowed hard. She put her head in her hands and sat at the edge of the bed staring down at the floor. Her head was pounding. There was a sharp pulsing pain that ran from behind her eyes down into the back of her neck. It had begun last night when she'd seen them kiss—Emily and the detective. The memory sent a fresh wave of nausea, a shudder of pain, through her. She took another drink of scotch from the bottle.

The bastard downstairs had failed her. She reached into her overnight bag for some clean clothing. She had an appointment today. She had an appointment with Dr. Marin. She dressed and looked around the loft. There was something she wanted. The knife. Where was it? She wanted the knife Obecny had used on Emily. It was downstairs . . . with the cab-driver, she remembered. She stood up slowly, resolutely. She walked unsteadily to the door of the loft and then, holding tightly to the railing, she made her way down the steps to the third floor.

Metal shutters sealed the big loft like a tomb. Andrea peered into the darkness. She was reluctant to turn on the overhead light. She didn't want to see him. She hated him, despised him. He had failed her and she did not want to look at him ever again. She shut her eyes. The pain in her head was so severe that she had to lean back against the brick wall to steady herself. With her eyes closed, she searched the wall for the light switch, found it and flicked it on. Head down, facing the floor, she opened her eyes.

The overhead light was mercifully dim. She started across the loft, toward the tool shed. She stepped carefully over the drying slicks of blood that led like a trail to the metal closet. The crowbar with which she'd stunned Obecny lay next to one of the puddles. He hadn't fallen from the first blow. He'd turned and stared dumbly at her and she'd been forced to swing again, to smash his face with the iron rod. Bits of flesh had clung to the crowbar. They were still visible, hideously clumped along the rusted metal, flesh and hair and the strange browning blood that held them to the bar.

She came to the place where he had first fallen. His body had left a mess like a child's finger paints. The floor was smeared with reddish furrows from his clawing fingers and designs drawn in the blood by Obecny's sliding knees and feet and face. He had reared to his knees, bellowing like the animal he was. He had tried to grab her. He couldn't see, of course. His eyes were filled with blood by then. He rubbed his eyes and screamed and groped for her. She had to stab him to stop him.

Near the crowbar, she saw the clothing she had ripped off and thrown away. Her own clothes, which he'd bloodied . . . as he'd bloodied the floor, the crowbar, the knife, and everything that had touched him. Nothing had gone as she'd planned. She'd wanted

him in the tool locker. She'd wanted to keep him there until she could reason with him about the money and Dr. Marin. But she'd had to stab him.

When he was on the floor, bellowing, lunging blindly at her, she'd pulled the knife out of her pocket and snapped open the blade. It was astounding how the sound of the blade cut through his pain and panic; how the almost inaudible click of the release mechanism and the quick whisper of the blade stopped him dead. He froze and waited.

"I have the knife. It's open. I want you in that closet. Inside that tool shed. Go on," she'd screamed. "Get in there! *Now!*"

"Sick bitch . . ."

She'd slashed him. She thought she'd hit his shoulder. She'd wanted to wound him; scare the hell out of him; make him do as she ordered. But the blade slipped. It must have. Her arm was tensed to strike into muscle and bone. Instead, he moved, or she did, or the knife slipped . . . and she'd sheared through soft flesh. The knife cut sideways, through a layer of surprisingly thick skin, and then soft and in. She had slit his throat. He grabbed at it with two hands. The blood spurted through his fingers. Andrea had jumped back, screaming, "Get up. Get in there. Now, damn you! *Now!*"

To her astonishment, he did. He struggled to his feet and, still clutching his neck, still too blind to see her, he tried to get to the locker. He staggered and fell and stood up again. Andrea watched. Then, at the door of the tool shed, he turned suddenly. She thought he was going to try to attack her. She tensed and began to back away. But he fell to his knees. He slid slowly to his knees and then pitched forward onto his belly and his torn face and he just lay there. He was still alive. She saw his back working, moving up and down with each breath.

She ran. She ran upstairs and showered. She left her clothing in a heap on the bathroom floor. She must have fallen asleep after that. When she awoke, it was dark and she was lying naked on top of the brown bedspread. She went to the window. She peered through the telescope. She must have been thinking of Emily, dreaming of Emily. She remembered Obecny vaguely. She remembered that he was still alive downstairs. But she didn't want to think about that.

She was making up a wonderful story for Emily. It was about how the cabdriver had gotten out of jail and come looking for her, Andrea . . . because of the way she'd hurt him, because of the way she'd tried to protect Emily from him. He had come looking for her. He had threatened her. He had shown her the tape and told her everything. Everything. Oh, poor Emily. Poor darling. Now that she knew, now that Andrea knew all, she would take care of her, protect her, love her always. Emily would be safe at last.

So she had crossed the darkened loft and gone to the window and peered through the telescope. And she had seen him . . . the man, the detective . . . She had seen him take Emily into his arms and kiss her. She had watched them embrace and then, trembling, she had made the telephone call.

It was his fault—Luffrono's. If the detective had left Emily alone, had not touched and soiled her, taken advantage of the frightened and lonely girl, Obecny might still be alive. But she'd scrambled back into her bloody clothes and rushed downstairs and begged Lawrence Obecny to get up, to kill the detective. "Now," she screamed at him. "Get up!" She promised him the money he wanted. Five thousand dollars. Yes. She would give him all of it, if only he would move, get up, destroy the man who had embraced Emily. Destroy Luffrono. Bob Luffrono . . .

Andrea had begun to cry. Destroy him. Kill him.

Luffrono. Kill Luffrono. And then, she'd thumped on Obecny's stubborn back. Thumped on his back, screaming, "Get up. I want you to kill him. I'll give you anything. You must! Get up. You must!"

The knife was in her hand. She was plunging it into his back. She hadn't even realized it until the blade stuck suddenly. How or why, she didn't know. But she had driven it too deeply, too hard, and it must have twisted. She let go of the handle and left it in his back and tore her clothes off and threw them down. Screaming, blinded by tears, aching all over, she rushed back upstairs again.

She took some tranquilizers—two, three, five . . . she couldn't remember. Marin had refused her medication. The pills were from her regular physician. She didn't know what they were. She took the phone with her and crawled into bed. She lay there, with her hand on the receiver, unable to dial. And then she started to drink again. She drank until she passed out.

Lawrence Obecny's body was on the floor in front of her. Andrea reached down and grabbed the handle of the switchblade knife that obtruded from his back. She grabbed it with two hands and yanked at it with all her strength. The knife tore free. She carried it back upstairs, cleaned it, put it in her purse, and finished preparing herself for her appointment with the psychiatrist.

She stopped on her way back to the Heights to pick up another bottle of scotch. She opened it in the car and drank some of it. She made a game of it, filling her mouth each time she stopped for a traffic light, swallowing when the light turned green again. It occurred to her that she ought to adhere to routine as much as possible today. That meant leaving the Jaguar at home and taking a cab to Marin's office. It was always difficult to park in his neighborhood.

She ran her fingers through her hair. He did that, Andrea remembered. The detective was always running his fingers through his hair. Her fingers caught in the uncombed tangles and she raked her hair mercilessly, tearing at the stubborn knots and tangles that hindered her imitation of Luffrono. There was a knot in her belly, too. That one she couldn't rake through or untie. She could try to burn it out, though—with the scotch. Andrea drank again and massaged the ache in her gut. The next thing she knew, she was crying. She blinked away the tears as best she could and wove through the less trafficked side-streets until she arrived in front of her Brooklyn Heights brownstone.

She hurried inside and up to her bedroom. She looked around expectantly, as if something to wear, some clean and handsome new outfit, would appear magically. She was too tired to make a decision, too tired to open the closets and choose. She stumbled to her bed and sat, dismally, at the edge of it and stared at the photographs arrayed there. She stared at the picture of Honey. Tears welled once again in her eyes. Tears and, for the first time ever, anger at the beautiful girl in the silver frame.

Andrea picked up the photograph. "If you hadn't died, none of this would ever have happened. You deserted me first. Without you, there was no one to protect me. It wasn't fair, hon. Oh, my honey, if you had lived, would you have chosen him over me? She has. Emily has. Everyone leaves me. You were the first, but everyone leaves, betrays me, sooner or later. Everyone finds someone else to love. It hurts, mommy. Nobody knows how terribly it hurts, my Honey-Mommy . . ."

She placed the photograph face down on the bed and left the room. She'd wanted to smash it, but couldn't. She made her way down the stairs as carefully as possible. In the kitchen, she splashed water on

her face. She sat down at the kitchen table and took the memo pad out of her purse and re-read the poem. Then, with the little gold pencil, she began to jot down some new lines. She composed and crossed out several. Finally, the right ones came. She finished her love poem, stepped back out into the cold, hailed a cab, and gave the driver Dr. Marin's address.

He was not pleased to see her. She could tell that at once. He even looked away from her at the start of the session. He stood up and began to water his plants. His back was to her. "You see Andrea," Marin was saying, "when you come here drunk, or very hung over . . ."

"I've got to wash," she interrupted him suddenly. Her voice was slurred. There wasn't much she could do about it. He was in the middle of pinching back a young avocado plant. His manicured fingers plucked at the new leaves delicately.

He lifted his hand from the plant. His fingers were still held like pincers, like polished pink claws. "In there," he said, making no attempt to hide his distaste for her unkempt state.

She reeled toward the small washroom and scrubbed her hands again and wet her face. She dried her hands on the paper towels that were laid out on top of the john. There were real towels, linen towels, on the rack behind her. She didn't feel like using elegant little linen towels today. She ran her fingers through her hair and, again, they caught in the tangles that could not be tidied.

When she came back, he was seated, waiting for her. She tried to meet his disapproving gaze, but couldn't quite. She stumbled toward her chair and held onto the arm with two hands and stared at the seat. "They're dead," she mumbled.

Marin didn't even bother asking her to repeat it or what she'd meant or even, "Who's dead, Andrea?" He

shook his head as if he hadn't heard her at all. "Today is a complete waste of time," he said.

"Sorry . . ."

"Your time, not mine," he assured her pointedly. "This doesn't help you at all."

"Nothing helps." She sat down again and looked over at him. Her head ached, her gut ached, her hands were still sticky. She began to cry. Never . . . never had she felt so utterly deserted; never so utterly alone. Hopeless was why. Help, she wanted to scream, she wanted to whimper, she wanted to beg. She was shrinking in the chair. She was becoming smaller and smaller, and if someone didn't do something soon there would be no more Andrea. Maybe that was what she'd wanted all along? She was tired. Oh so tired of being big and strong and brave and alone.

"Why do you make me come here? I don't want to talk to you." She recognized her voice. It came from far away. It was a little girl's voice—far away, long ago.

"Why did you get drunk?"

"Don't you understand anything? Dr. Marin, I . . . I did write a new ending for my poem. Do you want to hear it?" There was a glimmer of interest in his eyes. Andrea opened her purse and took out the memo pad. "'It was winter when love ended . . .'" Her eyes blurred suddenly with tears. She lowered the pad and finished the fresh but already memorized line: "'. . . the fire we shared went out, unwanted, *unneeded, untended.*' Oh, God." She grabbed her stomach suddenly. "I'm going to throw up." She hurried into the washroom and slammed the door behind her.

Chapter 16

The cabdriver was singing. "Oh, the weather outside is fright-ful . . . But you . . . make it . . . delight-ful . . ."

Emily was thinking of Luffrono. The words of the song seemed perfect to her. "Excuse me, Mario. What is that?"

"What's what?"

"That song . . ."

He grinned at her in the rearview mirror. "You know something, I don't even know. It's from some moving picture. Esther Williams was in it, I think. And somebody, like Ricardo what's-his-name from Fantasy Island . . . The regular one, not the little guy . . . I think he sung it to her. Or maybe it was the other Latin, Fernando . . . Or Van Johnson. Didn't she make a lot of pictures with Van Johnson?"

"Gee, I don't know." Emily laughed. "It sounds like a very . . . happy song, though. I'm sorry I interrupted you."

Mario DeLupis shrugged good-naturedly. "I'll tell my old lady you said so. She interrupts me all the time when I start to sing . . . and she's never sorry about it. She used to like my singing. She used to like that song, in fact. No more. I used to sing it to her when we were . . . you know, before we were married . . . when we were . . ."

"In love?"

"Yeah. In love." He stopped in front of Bridge Towers and turned to face Emily. "You're in love, aren't you? That's why you liked that song, hey?"

Emily put the money in his tray and nodded her head yes.

"Oh, yeah . . . I can always tell. Look at you. You're all smiling and happy. You got that look." He winked. "Love. Well, listen . . . thanks." He took the money out of the tray. "And best of luck to you. You give the guy a break though. You let him keep on singing, okay?"

"Okay," Emily promised. She got out of the cab and waved goodbye to DeLupis. She was thinking that she'd have to tell Bob about him. Luffrono had been so wonderful, but far too concerned about her all of a sudden. He was nervous about her taking taxis again. She knew he meant well, still he'd have to understand that she didn't want to trade one mother-hen husband for another mother-hen . . . Husband? Slow down, Emily, she cautioned herself. Not yet. Not until you're sure you can take care of yourself. Then you'll have a choice; a real choice. Not yet!

The taxis weren't all that bothered him. He'd also suggested that she get some curtains soon. Yes, the view was wonderful and no, she didn't have to worry about prying eyes . . . But there was always the weather to consider, he'd argued strangely. The apartment was drafty, or it could be . . . so close to the river and all. Better get something up there to cover

the windows. Emily laughed—at him and at herself because here she was carrying a box of drapery hooks and, if the man at the store kept his promise, the curtains would be delivered this afternoon.

She asked Gus as she entered the building. He took off his cap and scratched his head. "I thought you took them up already. I put them in the mail room for you, but they're not there anymore. I was in there a little while ago . . . just warming up," he said, grinning. She could smell a trace of the "warmth" on his breath. She nodded understandingly. "Mrs. Marx probably got them. She and the old man came in right after the package got here. They must have gone in there to check their mail and they probably lugged the box upstairs with them. You know Mrs. Marx . . ."

"Ida's an angel," Emily said. "They both are, Ida and Sam. Well, thanks, Gus. Stay warm."

"You bet, Miss Hollender."

As she stepped out of the elevator, Ida called to her. "Emily . . . be careful."

She looked up. Ida was peeping out of her apartment. "Wait."

"Hi, Ida." Something was wrong. Emily waited, trying to hold on to the smile that was starting to curdle with grave premonition.

"Just a minute," Ida called. She unlatched the door to her apartment and joined Emily in the hall. "Be careful, darling. We think we heard someone snooping around your apartment today." Ida looked over her shoulder nervously. "Sam went to look . . . He hasn't come back."

A thousand possibilities raced through Emily's mind. Not one of them made enough sense to be memorable. She glanced at Ida skeptically, then headed toward her apartment, keys out, ready.

"Wait! I'll go with you."

Emily slowed her pace and, with the older woman

practically tip-toeing beside her, she unlocked the door and walked inside. Nothing seemed to have been disturbed in the twilight-dimmed room. Emily turned on the light. The box of curtains lay unopened near the television set.

"He's not here, Ida."

"That I already know. Someone saw him going down the stairs. So what's he doing? An old man six flights . . . without telling me . . . ?" She pulled a cigarette out of her apron pocket. "You got a light?"

"I think there are some matches in the kitchen . . . Do you see Jenny anywhere?"

"Jenny?"

"My cat. She's a little orange and white . . . Oh."

"You think I didn't know you sneaked in a cat? Come on," Ida said. "Only I didn't know the name. Jenny. Very nice. Sam had a sister Jenny—also orange and white." She tugged at her own choppy red hair. "She used to henna it herself. She wouldn't pay a nickel to get it done right. Orange. It always came out orange." Ida shook her head. The cigarette was trembling in her hands, Emily noticed.

"I'll get you a match. Just a second, Ida." She went into the kitchen, got a box of safety matches and took a quick look around for Jenny. The kitchen wasn't very large, but there were plenty of places in it for a cat to hide. She'd check again in a minute. She hurried out to light Ida's cigarette.

"How long has Sam been gone?"

Ida inhaled deeply. "An hour and a half, two . . ." She was trying to be casual about it, Emily realized, but her hand was still trembling.

After they'd phoned Gus on the intercom and asked if he'd seen Sam in the last couple of hours—he hadn't—Emily went to her phone index. She moved the mechanical button to L and pressed it down. Both of Luffrono's numbers were there. She dialed him

at work. He'd given her his home number last night and watched, smiling, as she'd written it and the station house number onto the index page.

"Luffrono . . ." He was typing something. He hadn't stopped when he picked up the phone.

"Bob, hi. It's Emily."

The sound of the typewriter ceased abruptly. "I knew it was you. I was just thinking about you. Did you get those drapes up yet?"

She smiled. "No . . . Bob, my neighbor . . . Ida Marx . . . her husband is missing. He . . ."

Ida was puffing on the cigarette. Her head was wreathed in smoke. "I wouldn't call the cops so fast," she said to no one in particular. "It's not so unusual . . . No big deal . . ."

"How long has he been gone?"

"About two hours."

"Two hours and fifteen minutes," Ida called from the smoke cloud.

"Did he say where he was going?"

"Well . . . Sam and Ida thought they heard noises in my apartment. It was probably Jenny. Sam went to check . . ."

"And?" She could hear the concern in his voice.

"He . . . uh, he never came back."

"It's not unusual," Ida said.

"Where are you now?"

"In my apartment."

"Is everything in its place?"

Emily looked around the room again. "Yeah . . . well . . . I can't find Jenny. . . ."

He paused thoughtfully. She was about to speak again when he said quickly, if not very convincingly, "She probably slipped out."

"Maybe so."

"Ah, listen. I'll come over as soon as I can. Okay?"

"Sure. Okay. Thanks." She hung up. "He'll be here in a little while, Ida. Would you like some coffee?"

"I think I should go back to my place. Maybe he'll call . . . if he hasn't forgotten the number."

"I'll go with you," Emily said. In spite of the wry comments and casual air, Ida looked worried and, Emily realized, she looked old suddenly, fragile.

"Come . . . Stay . . . I'm fine, fine . . ."

"I'd rather go with you . . . I . . . I'm a little nervous."

"Oh," Ida said. "So come."

Once inside her own apartment, Ida began rummaging through the drawers of the sideboard.

"Where would Sam go?" Emily asked cautiously.

Ida didn't bother to look up. "Sam goes . . . He goes . . ." She shrugged philosophically.

"Ida, why don't you sit down? I'll fix some tea."

"No. I'm looking for those little bottles we got on the plane from Miami." She closed the drawer and crossed to another cabinet to continue her search. "Once he went to Philadelphia, just like that. His brother lives in Philly. He was gone thirteen days that time . . . so what's two hours and twenty minutes . . . Ah-ha!" She found the bottles and held one up triumphantly.

"A lot," Emily said. Ida was trying to open one of the miniature bottles of liquor. "By the way, your hand is shaking."

"It's nothing. Go in the kitchen. See if there's some ice."

Emily shook her head but went. She opened the top door, the freezer section of Ida's refrigerator. As she pried loose an ice tray, there was a tremendous crash from the living room. She let the tray and a package of frozen spinach that slid out after it fall to the floor and she ran to see what had happened.

Ida was on the floor. The hand in which she still

held the little bottle of whiskey was jerking spasmodically. Her eyes were wide open, glazed. Her mouth moved silently.

"God, no," Emily gasped. She ran to the phone and dialed the police emergency number. They told her to stay calm, an ambulance would be on its way in minutes. She hung up and knelt beside Ida and smoothed her brow. "Shhh. Don't talk, Ida. It's going to be all right. Please. Just rest. Don't try to talk."

An ambulance did arrive within ten minutes. By then, Ida had regained some of her color and all of her concern for Sam. "He's going to kill me for getting sick," she told Emily who walked beside the gurney on which the attendants were wheeling Ida to the elevator. "Break the news to him gentle . . ." She saw the alarm on Emily's face. "Hey, I ain't dying! I didn't say I was dying!"

"Oh, I'm so sorry, Ida . . ."

"Don't be sorry. Tell him to call me at the hospital."

"I will, I promise."

Exhausted, Emily returned to her apartment. The telephone rang almost immediately. She answered it, resting her head against the cold glass of the picture window. It was Luffrono. He asked if Sam had turned up yet. She told him no and then she told him what had happened to Ida and then she began to weep.

"Hang on. Just hang in there. Listen, I can't break loose now . . . Do something. Lock the door. Is the door locked? Well lock it, and then find something to do, something to keep you busy for a while."

She saw the box of curtains, waiting to be hung. "All right," she told him. "I will. I'm tired, Bob. I feel very tired . . ."

"I'll get there as soon as I can, Emily . . . I love you." She stared out the window. "Did you hear me?"

"Yes. I . . . Is it going to be all right? Are we going to be all right?"

"You are tired, aren't you? Listen, I may have to hang around here for quite a while. Maybe it would be better for you to get some sleep."

"Maybe . . ."

"Emily, I love you."

"I'll leave a set of keys with Gus . . . the doorman. Come over whenever you can."

"No," he said quickly, concerned. "Don't give the keys to anyone." Then he took a lighter tone. "I'll phone you at work tomorrow. Emmie, it's all going to turn out fine. Get some sleep."

She hung up. "Bob, I love you," she whispered. Then she opened the box of curtains and began to fasten the hooks she'd bought to the pleated tops of the drapes.

Marin wanted to see her again. Andrea complied. She sat in the chair in his office and stared at the back of the clock on his desk. She'd tried to do something about her hair today. She'd washed it, and her hands, and her whole body, but it still didn't look right. There was something tangled and unclean about her.

She raked her hair the way the detective did, but it hadn't helped. It hadn't helped the way she looked or felt. Or the way she smelled, for that matter. She smelled like licorice. No one else seemed to notice. Dr. Marin hadn't said anything about it. But she kept on smelling licorice, the kind Obecny had liked so much. She'd smelled it on the third floor landing this morning. She smelled it still.

"I think it would be advantageous, at this point, Andrea, for you to think this out in a safe environment . . . in a hospital atmosphere. I've made preparations for admitting you this evening. . . ."

She tried to remember whether she'd told Dr.

Marin about Obecny yesterday. She couldn't remember. So much had happened since then. It was becoming difficult to keep track of what she'd told him or what she hadn't; of what she'd done or what she was going to do. She especially wanted to tell him about the pain. Pain was slicing through her. She hadn't felt anything like it since she was a little girl . . . not since . . . long ago and far away. Terrible pain . . . that threatened to split her wide open.

"Andrea . . . ? I want you to understand. I'll go with you and we can have a short session after you're settled. This evening, Andrea. Do you understand . . . ?"

She blinked her eyes and stared at Dr. Marin. What was there to understand? He was going to send her away. She knew what that really meant. It meant that if she continued to behave childishly, he would send her away. But if she was good, if she acted very grown up, he would let her stay. Just as Julie had.

Nanny told her that he was going to send her away. You're only a child, Andrea. Your father is a very busy man, a very important man. He can't take care of a child . . .

Yes he can. I'll be good. I'll behave like a big lady, you'll see.

She'd have to pretend to be grown up like Mommy. Close your eyes and pretend, Andrea. Then daddy will love you and marry you and you'll be safe.

But Honey-Mommy wasn't safe. She was dead and gone away; sent away. She must have done something very bad, very childish, for daddy to send her away like that.

I'll be good, Daddy. I'll be your good Honey. I'll kiss you and hug you and I won't scream, I promise, and I'm only crying because it hurts and I can't breathe, Daddy. Ahhhh. I'm not really a big lady. I'm not really your Honey. Stop, Daddy. Ahhhh. It was only pretend, Daddy . . . so you wouldn't make me

dead and send me away like . . . Mommy, I hate you!

She saw Dr. Marin's lips moving. She heard the paternal drone, the familiar coaxing firmness. ". . . but for now, for your own peace . . ." Rest in peace. ". . . of mind, we'll go ahead . . . Andrea . . . You do understand."

Andrea smiled. "Now open your mouth," she whispered. "Ah—say ahh . . . D-don't hurt mmme . . ."

He stood. "Then you'll be ready this evening? I'll come by and pick you up. We'll go to the hospital together . . . Andrea?"

"Yes, Dr. Marin. Tonight. This evening. I'll be ready."

He walked her to the door, not just to the door of his office, but through the waiting room and out into the lobby.

"Will you be all right? Shall I get a cab for you?"

It was cold in the lobby. His hands were in the pockets of his tweed jacket, thumbs out. He stood there, on the alcove steps, looking down at her. It made her feel small, childish again. Andrea took a deep breath and squared her shoulders. "I'll be fine, Dr. Marin. I'll see you this evening."

She felt his eyes on her as she walked out of the building. She was grateful to him for that. If he hadn't stood and watched, judging her all the while, she might have come apart right then and there. His appraising stare gave her strength. She was good at pretending; he had just reminded her of that.

By five P.M., she was ready.

Her bag was packed. She'd put a number of practical things on top—her striped silk pajamas, a robe, slippers, underwear, a cosmetic case filled with little plastic bottles of cleanser, face cream, shampoo, conditioner . . . She'd thought about packing the photograph of her mother. If Dr. Marin did open the bag,

it would seem appropriate, authentic. But, at the last moment, she'd decided that she couldn't. However deserted she'd felt by Honey's death, Andrea loved her and decided, finally, that it would be wrong; a desecration to take the photograph where she was going.

Under the conventional clothing, she had packed one very special outfit. She had chosen it with unusual care. It was chic, fitted, flawless. A clinging blouse and flowing trousers that moved with liquid grace; raw silk, deep regal purple—the color of twilight . . . or dawn. She packed an elegant pair of sandals, as well. And, in an antique amber flask with a silver stopper, a scent reminiscent of lilacs in the rain.

She saw the taxi pull up in front of the house. She unlatched the front door and waited. When he rang the bell, she ran up the stairs, to the first landing, and called out: "It's open, Dr. Marin. Come in."

He did. Silently, from the darkness of the staircase, she watched him. He saw the suitcase in the entryway. He acknowledged its presence with a tight self-congratulatory nod. He was wearing a well-tailored overcoat, leather gloves and a silk scarf. His thick silver hair seemed untouched by the wind, but he removed his gloves and, glancing into the hall mirror, patted his hair and brushed his shoulders, preening at the vision of perfection that peered back at him.

Andrea moved quietly up the stairs. "Dr. Marin, I'm almost ready," she called.

He looked around. He didn't see her. "There's no rush," he said.

She hurried along the thickly carpeted corridor and then down the service stairs that led to the kitchen. She moved to the dining room door and opened it a crack. He was still in the entry hall. She couldn't see him. But then, he couldn't see her either. "I didn't want to keep you waiting . . ."

"Oh . . . I'm early, actually." Marin followed her

voice. He entered the living room with its high ceiling and extravagantly ornate molding. He stopped before the fireplace and turned toward the dining room. The large mahogany doors were partially pulled back. He was looking into the dining room but Andrea had let the kitchen door swing quietly shut again.

"Can I fix you something?" she called from the kitchen. "A drink?"

"Oh, no. Thank you. It's not necessary." He folded his hands behind him and began to rock back and forth on the soles of his shoes. They were elegant shoes, soft and supple, but something, the cold or dampness, had stiffened the leather and they creaked as he rocked. "I'm glad you understand about the hospital," he said.

Andrea opened one of the utensil drawers. Obecny's knife was in her purse and her purse was already in the car. She wouldn't have used it anyway. "Of course I understand."

"I'm pleased," he said. He glanced toward the dining room again, then turned to examine a cut crystal vase filled with fresh roses. The vase was on a marble-topped table near the mahogany doors. "We're not talking about a long time, you realize that."

She ran her fingers lightly across the knives and corkscrews and ice picks in the drawer. "How long?" There was a carving set among them, a long fork with two razor-sharp tines and a knife as long as the fork and as sharp. Their handles were shaped like scimitars, curved like the handles of Arabian swords. Andrea took the knife out of the drawer and silently reclosed it.

"It's difficult to say. How long do *you* think?"

Andrea laughed softly at his response. Her coat was draped over one of the kitchen chairs. She put it on.

"Andrea?" Dr. Marin said. She watched him through the space between the kitchen door and the doorjamb.

He was looking for her. He walked toward the entry hall again and she slipped quietly out of the kitchen.

"Andrea, where are you?" Marin returned to the living room and crossed to the sliding mahogany doors. He stood at the threshold of the dining room for a moment, then he stepped inside.

"I'm right here," she said.

Dr. Marin turned. Andrea was standing behind him. She was holding the knife high, with two hands, high above her head. The psychiatrist looked up. His eyes widened with disbelief. "Andrea . . ." he began.

She brought the knife down, full force. "Please don't send me away, Dr. Marin . . . Please," she urged him.

He grabbed his chest where the knife had entered it. The look on his face was still one of disbelief, of mystified incomprehension. Andrea struck again. This time the blow caught him in the stomach and he doubled over, exposing his back to her. She stabbed again and again until he lay lifeless at her feet. Then she hurled the knife across the room.

She rushed to the entryway and reached for her suitcase. Her hands were bloody. She rubbed them on her coat, picked up the bag, and ran outside to her car. She needed time. She had to get to the loft and get ready. There was the blood. She rubbed her palm on her coat again and then, carelessly, she ran her hand through her hair. The gesture reminded her of the detective. She shook her head vigorously and let her wavy hair spill forward. She'd planned to shower anyway. She would shower, shampoo her hair. She had her cosmetics in the suitcase, and her makeup . . .

At the first traffic light she came to, she looked into her purse. It was all there: the tape recorder; the cassette of . . . what had they called it, the policewoman and Dr. Marin? . . . Oh, yes. Incident! She had the cassette of the incident. And Obecny's knife.

She had watched Emily through the telescope last

night and, again, early this morning as Emily prepared to leave for work. She had seemed cautious and disturbed when she'd entered her apartment with the scrawny woman who smoked too much. And more upset later, when she'd begun to hang the curtains. But not enough.

Lucky Emily—there were so many people who wanted to take care of her, to protect her. The detective did; and the old man who'd come to check on her apartment yesterday and followed Andrea down the stairs. Silly old man. No, Emily had not been distressed enough last night or this morning to know how badly she needed Andrea. Tonight, she would find out.

Chapter 17

The lobby of Bridge Towers was crawling with cops. In the reception area opposite the elevators, where a couple of couches meant to add a touch of luxury conveyed, instead, all the drama of a dentist's waiting room, Greg and Lorraine Weingast were seated. Their mother hovered behind the detectives who were questioning the children.

"They were playing." She was near hysteria. Her eyes were red with tears. "They were just playing," she told Jim Swid.

"Mrs. Weingast, *please* . . ." Swid urged. He turned back to the children, kneeling this time. "Okay . . . You were in the basement where they store the refrigerators . . ."

Mrs. Weingast gasped loudly and shielded her eyes. She looked away, displaying her embarrassment and distress to a rapt audience of neighbors and the uniformed police who were trying to clear the area.

Swid glanced over his shoulder at her and shook his

head. ". . . Then you opened one," he continued to the children, ". . . and what did you see?"

The boy stared at his mother, too intimidated by her to reply. The girl, Lorraine, said matter-of-factly: "He was all bloody."

"She's hysterical!" Mrs. Weingast shrieked. "She's hysterical!"

Downstairs, the fingerprint and photographic teams were finishing up. A bank of old refrigerators lined a wall of the storage room. One of the refrigerators was open. A pool of blood filled the bottom of it and trickled in a rivulet onto the concrete floor. The sides and opened door were smeared with blood as well. Two ambulance attendants were lifting the body bag containing Sam Marx onto a gurney.

Luffrono signaled to one of the younger detectives who was dusting the outside of the open door for prints. "Noonan, you better check all the refrigerators, the stoves, any trunks you can open and the rest of the junk down here."

"What? Another stiff?"

"No."

"Then what the hell am I looking for?"

"An orange cat," Luffrono said.

He followed the gurney to the elevator and rode up to the lobby with the body. He needed air. A couple of cops cleared the way for the gurney and Luffrono walked behind it, eager to get outside for a couple of minutes. The street door opened. Emily walked in. She stared at the body bag being wheeled toward the entrance. Then, stunned, she saw Luffrono.

"It's Sam Marx," he told her.

"Oh my God!" Mrs. Weingast keened.

Emily, standing rigidly straight, looked into Luffrono's eyes.

"Kids playing in the basement found the body," he said softly.

Jim Swid walked over. "Mrs. Weingast, could you take the children upstairs now, please?" He motioned to an officer nearby who led the wailing woman away.

"I have to call Ida," Emily said. She started toward the elevator. Luffrono stopped her.

"Emmie, wait!" He took her arm and walked with her. "I want you to stay home and I don't want you to let anyone in. I've got some work to do. Jimmy! I'll be back, okay?"

Emily nodded and left him as Swid approached. "Jimmy," Luffrono said, "take her upstairs. I'll see you back at the car. . . . Nick!" Another detective joined him. "I want the names of anyone with a Brooklyn Heights or vicinity address who bought a telescope in the last eight or nine days. A big one, expensive. I want it tonight."

"Luffrono, the stores'll be closed . . ."

"Tonight, Nickie."

Upstairs, Emily moved deliberately, slowly, performing the ritual tasks of home-coming. It was almost impossible not to glance at Ida and Sam's door as she passed it and equally difficult not to listen for Jenny's welcoming mew as she unlocked her own door.

She wanted to talk with Ida immediately but she could feel her throat going dry and her tongue thickening and she knew that she'd have to calm down before trying to phone the hospital. So she took off her hat and gloves and coat and put them away neatly. She walked to the window and stared out at the bridge. The curtains were only partially hung. She touched them absently, tugged them to see how they held. She thought a cup of tea would probably help but, suddenly, she hadn't the energy to fill the kettle.

Finally, she dialed information and got the number of the hospital. She sat down at the table and stared at the phone. Then she realized that she hadn't asked Luffrono how Sam Marx had died. She hurried to the

door and unlocked it and looked out into the corridor hoping to catch a glimpse of the blond detective, Swid, who'd accompanied her upstairs. It was too late. He'd already left.

It didn't matter. It didn't matter, she decided. Sam was dead and someone would have to tell Ida, and Emily was afraid that it might be Mrs. Weingast who'd decide to break the ghastly news. She returned to the table and phoned the hospital.

After five minutes and three separate explanations of what she wanted, the first operator she'd spoken to was back on the line.

"Well, I did talk to the Admitting Office," Emily told the computer-calm voice at the other end of the phone.

"Do you know who her doctor is?"

"No, but she . . ."

"One moment please."

She waited, turning toward the window again to focus her attention on something other than her increasingly raw nerves.

"Admitting Office. May I help you?"

Emily sighed. "Yes. I'm still trying to find a patient by the name of Ida Marx.

"I told you Miss, we have . . . Please hold." She did. She watched the traffic on the bridge, the lights across the water. She thought she could pick out the River Cafe and the rectangular monolith of The Watchtower building . . . There was a click on the line. "Operator? Hello?"

She stared across the river and wondered if the lights beyond the bridge, the ones radiating like star bursts through the foggy night, higher up and farther back than the waterfront lights, belonged to buildings in Brooklyn Heights. She wondered, if she tried very hard, whether she could pick out the twin beacons of the 12th Precinct, or Luffrono's green Chrysler cruising the neighborhood. Then she thought about the

body bag. It was green, too. Almost the same color as Bob's car.

She clicked the phone impatiently, half-expecting that she would press down too long or hard on the button and disconnect herself and have to start all over again, but the computer voice said, "Yes?"

"Operator, I've been waiting for five minutes!"

"Well I just don't have a Mrs. Marx. Are you sure she was admitted?"

"Yes. Yesterday evening. Late." The body bag. Luffrono. Police cars in front of the building. Policeman all over the lobby . . . the basement . . . the . . . Emily shuddered suddenly. Sam Marx had been killed! He hadn't died a natural death, had a stroke or heart attack from walking down six flights of stairs. If he had, why would there have been so many policeman? That was why Luffrono had asked her to stay at home and not to let anyone into her apartment.

The operator was back on the line. "Well her card probably wasn't filed yet . . . Oh, I see! Here it is! I'm sorry. We do have a Mrs. Marx. She's been taken to emergency surgery."

It took her a minute to respond. "Th-thank you," she said, and hung up. She sat, staring at the phone, thinking, trying not to think . . . Finally, she stood up and walked toward the kitchen.

"One shellfish, selfish," she recited distractedly. She took the tea kettle and began to fill it. "One selfish selfish, two rubber . . . rubber baby bug . . . buggys." She put the kettle on the stove. "One selfish baby . . ."

She opened the refrigerator and rummaged through it. Nothing looked appealing. She opened the freezer. She hadn't the breath to gasp, to scream. Jenny stared out at her—mouth open and teeth bared in a frozen snarl. The little cat's claws were extended from her paws which faced each other as if she were about to clap.

Emily held the freezer door open. She watched as Jenny slid from the overpacked compartment with a grating sound. She held the freezer door open as Jenny hit the floor with a sharp thud, like the sound of a frozen five-pound cut of beef. She stared down, jumped back, as the small snarling creature slid toward her feet. And then, finally, she shut her eyes and opened her mouth and while she could not find the scream that set her body vibrating, she did, at least, find her breath again. She ran for the phone.

She had to grip one of her hands with the other in order to steady it enough to dial.

"12th Precinct."

"Lieut-tt-t-tenant Luffrono, please."

"Luffrono's not here, Miss. Can I take a message?"

"W-where . . . is he?"

There was a pause as the sergeant checked his roster. Then, "On duty right now. Would you like to leave a message?"

"H-have him c-call mme b-b-back as ssoon as pp-p-possible."

"What's your name? . . . Hey!" he said, but she'd already hung up. "Leave your name!"

Emily pushed the button of her telephone index to "G." The lid popped open to the page with Andrea's address and phone number. She dialed the number with shaking hands. It rang and rang, unanswered. "Please," Emily whispered. "P-please, please answer . . ."

At the tenth ring, she hung up and her own phone rang. She picked up immediately. "Bob?"

"It's Andrea."

"Andrea! Thank God. I just called. S-some-one killed J-Jenny . . ."

"Oh! You shouldn't be alone."

"C-can you c-come over? Please?"

"Oh, hon, I would but I'm not dressed. Why don't you come over here. It would be faster, much faster."

"I c-can't. I'm n-not s-supposed to . . ." Her eyes strayed toward the kitchen. She looked away quickly. How could she stay in the apartment with . . . with . . . "Yes. I'll come there."

"Wait!" Andrea said. "Don't hang up. I . . . I've taken a loft on the river. You'll need the address."

"Oh. Wait. Just a second, please." There was a pencil on the table but no scrap paper. "All right. Go on."

"I'm just over the bridge. 17 River Street. Sixth floor. I'll leave the door open."

Emily copied the address down under Andrea's Brooklyn Heights listing. (New), she wrote, 17 River Street. "Andrea. Th-thanks."

"Hurry, hon. I'll be waiting."

Emily hung up. She tore the entire "G" page from the index, grabbed her coat, hat and purse, and hurried out the door. By the time she'd gotten to the lobby, her telephone was ringing. It rang for a long time, then stopped, and then it rang again.

In the green Chrysler, Luffrono held the mike and waited.

"Bob . . . ?"

"Okay, Iris," he told the operator at the station house. "Thanks anyway."

"What's up?"

"She doesn't answer," he told Swid, who was driving.

"Hang on, Bobby—"

He did, replacing the mike a second before Swid executed a screeching U-turn which headed the car back toward Bridge Towers.

"Thanks, Jimmy. Listen, her number's 517-2110. Got it? I'll check in as soon as I can." Luffrono

slammed the door and dashed up the walkway to the building.

Gus saluted him as he rushed by. He was thinking about taking the stairs up, but the elevator was already at the lobby. He paced inside it, pressed the 6 button each time he passed the floor selection panel, and bolted out the moment the car stopped at Emily's floor. He called her name from the hallway. He rang the bell.

"Emmie . . . ! Emily!" He was really feeling the strain. Dog-tired, he turned the door handle. It was open. He walked in and looked around. "Hey, Emily . . . ?" Emmie, you here?" He walked to the kitchen. Steam was blasting from the spout of the copper kettle on the stove. The refrigerator was open, propped open by the freezer compartment door. Luffrono looked down.

"Jesus Christ," he said softly.

Jenny lay, still frozen, in a puddle of melting ice. He entered the kitchen and turned off the gas under the kettle. Then he returned to the living room. The drapes were only half-hung. The telephone index was popped open on the table beside the phone. He walked to the window and stared out for a moment, then he hurried down to the lobby.

"Did you see Emily Hollender go out?" he asked the doorman.

Gus nodded. "Yeah . . . just before you came in. She took a cab."

"What kind of cab?"

The doorman was still nodding. "Yeah. A checker."

"You see a name on it? A company name? Did she happen to mention where she was going? Did you hear her tell the driver or anything? Did you see the driver? Any idea what he looked like? Was he a greasy-headed kind of guy . . . bad face, you know, pock-marked . . . ?"

"Nah, but he made an uptown U-turn."

Luffrono turned back toward the elevator.

"That was a terrible thing what happened to Mr. Marx," Gus called after him.

"Yeah," Luffrono said. He went back to Emily's apartment and took off his top coat and started looking around again. He checked the phone index. It was opened to "H." He ran his fingers down the page and stopped at Steven Hollender's number. He sat down. He started to dial Hollender. Then hung up and dialed another number instead.

"Elio?"

"Yeah." The dispatcher's voice was gruff as ever.

"It's me, Luffrono."

"What's up?"

"I need the pick-ups that were made in the last half hour at the Bridge Towers Apartment at Pearl."

"Are you kidding, Luffrono? That'll take all night!"

"Elio, please get it. I'll be at 517-2110."

Chapter 18

There was a light on at the top floor, the sixth floor. The rest of the warehouse was dark. Emily checked the index page and number above the front door. 17 . . . 17 River Street. "Thanks, Dave," she said to the driver. "This is it."

"You want me to wait? This is a spooky neighborhood."

"Thanks. No. Goodnight."

She walked up the wrought iron steps and into the building. Holding onto the railing, she started up the stairs. At the third floor, she stepped on a small paper packet. Whatever was inside it, crunched easily under the heel of her boot. She brushed the packet aside and an odor was released. The smell sent such a rush of adrenalin through her that she had to grip the railing with two hands to avoid swooning. She felt lightheaded, dizzy. She pulled herself up the stairs certain that her mind was playing tricks on her. It could not have been what she'd thought it was. She could not

have stepped on a package of Sen-Sens; not here . . .

There was only one door at the top floor. It was partially open. Emily peeked in. The loft was enormous and bare except for a bed placed oddly, almost in the center of the room. The walls were raw brick; a long old-fashioned radiator hung halfway up one of them.

"A-a-andrea? It's Emily!" She could hear the shower running. She called again, louder. "Hello! I'm here!" She looked toward a door at the far end of the loft; the bathroom door which was opened a crack and through which a fog of steam floated.

"Come in. Make yourself at home."

Emily walked into the big, mostly barren room. Huge windows faced north and west, offering a much more spectacular view than her own. A telescope, angled out at the city across the river. Feeling a little safer, a little more relaxed, she unbuttoned her coat and dropped her hat and purse on the bed. She moved past the windows.

"What a beautiful view," she called to Andrea. She touched the telescope, tentatively, then looked around at the bathroom. Steam was still drifting from the door. She turned back and bent down and put her eye to the view-finder of the impressive-looking scope.

She saw Bob Luffrono. Luffrono was sitting at a table framed by a window from which a set of draperies were only partially hung.

Emily drew back from the telescope abruptly and turned. Andrea was standing across the room, watching her. The shower water was still running; the steam still poured from the bathroom. But Andrea was dry and dressed. Her honey-colored hair was perfectly groomed. Her costume, an expensive-looking silk lounging suit, looked too elegant for the bare, raw loft. And she was wearing makeup. Too much makeup. Andrea hardly ever wore makeup.

"It's quite wonderful, sometimes," Andrea said,

smiling. "The telescope, I mean. The view, of course. What's wrong?"

Emily opened her mouth to speak. Only sounds came out. Stupid sounds that were meant to be words: "I-I-I-I-h-h-h-h . . ."

" . . . have to go?" Andrea asked. Her voice was as silky as her costume. Emily nodded dumbly. "No, you don't," Andrea said.

Emily shut her eyes. In her mind, she saw Luffrono again, as he had looked through the telescope. He was sitting at her table. He was looking down at her telephone index. He was talking to someone on her telephone.

"I don't look all the time, not *all* the time. Just every so often. To make sure . . . to make sure you're all right," Andrea was saying. "I'm glad you know. I don't want it to be a secret."

"Secret?" Emily opened her eyes again.

"I want you to know how I feel." Andrea had not moved. She was still standing near the bathroom, still smiling, still speaking in that silken whisper.

"P-please," Emily said.

"You said you wanted to talk. So do I, Emily. Very much." She began to walk toward her, carefully; so carefully that it was difficult to hear her footsteps even in the huge empty room. Emily moved back nervously, away from her.

"What's wrong? Don't be frightened. I won't hurt you. I'd never hurt you. Emily, I love you."

" . . . No . . . Please . . . "

"Are you shocked?"

Emily shook her head. "No," she said, after a moment.

"Emily, don't lie." Andrea's tone grew suddenly insistent, and she was closer now.

"I'm n-n-not!" Emily said quickly.

"I know . . . " She eased off. She tilted her head and

smiled again, lovingly. "You're sweet . . . You care . . . Poor Jenny." Emily's eyes snapped suddenly. Andrea met her gaze. "Someone killed her."

"Yes," Emily said softly.

Andrea drew close. "Poor Emily." She put out her hands. Her strange hazel eyes were melting with compassion. Her eyes, her hands, her whole self seemed to be reaching out to touch, to comfort Emily.

Involuntarily, Emily shuddered and pulled back. "Don't."

"Why are you afraid of me?"

"I-I don't know."

"If I touched you . . . Would you let me touch you?"

Emily gave an almost invisible nod of consent.

Andrea smiled again. "I comforted you once, didn't I? When that degenerate came back, I protected you, I made him leave, I took care of you . . . and then I . . . comforted you." Andrea was still whispering. Her deep soft voice was hypnotic.

Emily remembered the day that Obecny had tried to break into her apartment on Cranberry Street. It seemed like years ago. It was only days. And then she remembered how Andrea had embraced her after the rapist had fled. *And then I . . . comforted you.* That was what Andrea meant, that strange moment when she'd taken Emily into her arms and held her and rubbed her cheek and neck and trembling body with her face . . . with her lips.

Emily stood still now as Andrea moved toward her again. She forced herself to stand still, to hold her ground. Andrea's hand reached out and, hesitantly, touched Emily's hair, then began to move down to her face.

She couldn't help it. Her will broke. She pulled back and, suddenly, Andrea's hand shot out and grabbed her by the hair. Paralyzed with fear, Emily shook her head. "L-l-let go . . . p-p-please!"

Andrea's face contorted in pain. She released Emily and turned away. "I'm sorry . . . I didn't mean to hurt you. Oh, God, no . . ." She turned back slowly. "Emily, I'd never hurt you. Never." Once more she reached out, and once more Emily allowed her to touch, to stroke, her hair. "Do you believe me?"

"Y-y-yes."

"Why can't you smile?" Andrea asked wistfully. "You almost never do." She glanced over at the telescope. "I've seen you laugh . . . you're beautiful."

Emily's gaze followed Andrea's to the telescope. "That cop makes you laugh."

"... Sometimes ..."

"Go ahead."

"W-w-what?"

"Look."

"I don't understand ..."

"Into the telescope ... Go on. Look."

"I don't want to."

"Oh," Andrea crooned, "I think you do."

Emily hesitated, then forced herself to walk over to the telescope and peer into it. She saw him again—Luffrono, standing in front of her picture window. He appeared to be pondering the cityscape. His glance shifted from building to building until he was staring directly at her. Then he turned and sat down near the telephone and began to toy with the index, clicking it open and shutting it again ...

"Bob," she cried involuntarily.

Her view was abruptly blocked. She looked up to find Andrea standing in front of the telescope.

"Is he still there?"

"Yes," Emily said.

Andrea grabbed the telescope and tore it from the tripod. With sudden fury she smashed it against the brick wall. Emily covered her face, trying to shield

herself from the flying debris. Then, as suddenly as Andrea's frenzied anger erupted, it abated.

"Could you ever love me?" she asked. Her voice was the voice of a desperate, longing child. "Could you?" she urged. "Emily, could you ever love me?"

"I-I . . ."

"Does the thought turn you off?" Andrea's eyes were cold again, suspicious.

"N-no . . . No . . ."

"I don't believe you."

"I could . . . " Emily forced herself to hear the childish voice again; to remember the hurt and terrible confused compassion she'd seen in Andrea's eyes. "I-I could love you . . ."

"Really?"

"Y-you . . . you love a person for who they are . . ."

"But you don't really know me. I know you, but you don't know me at all. Do you?" Andrea ran her hands through her hair. She shook her head and stretched her neck back and raked her hair again. "Emily," she said, lowering her gaze so that her sad eyes were level with Emily's. "Can't you answer me?"

"I'm so tired . . . "

"Answer me!" Andrea snapped.

"I-I want to know you. Andrea, I d-do . . . want to know you."

Andrea put her hands to her brow. She shook her head and covered her eyes. When she moved her hands Emily could see that her eyes were flooded with tears. Her lips were quivering.

"Don't lie to me," Andrea said. It was a deep rasping whisper. It was a plea filled with such pain that, for a moment, Emily was tempted to reach out, to hold, to comfort the tortured woman. Her hands started to move forward automatically, but she pulled them back. She reached with her eyes, instead. She looked at

Andrea and her eyes reflected the deep pain and confusion she saw.

Andrea touched the collar of Emily's coat. She rubbed her palms gently across the front of the coat and then she opened it slowly, and pulled it back and then down over Emily's shoulders. Emily did not resist.

"I couldn't bear it if you were lying," Andrea said.

The map of Brooklyn was open on the table. Luffrono studied it as Swid read off the addresses that Nickie had been able to gather, the addresses of telescope buyers.

"1341 Logan . . ."

"No."

"115 Crescent . . ."

Luffrono located it on the street map. "No," he said.

Behind him the night sky lightened almost imperceptibly from black to blue; a colder, deeper blue than twilight brought to the city.

"20 Brookside," Swid droned on. "132 Hunter . . ."

"No good. That doesn't work either." Luffrono looked up. His pale eyes were red-rimmed, the normally dark hollows around them looked darker, deeper than ever. "That's all he's got?"

"That's all. Hey, you look like hell, Bobby, you know that?"

Luffrono tossed the map aside. "None of those have views," he said.

"Are you sure about this telescope thing?"

"Yeah, I'm sure of it." He looked at the closed phone index again. It was set to "G." He pressed the release bar. It opened . . . to "H." Luffrono closed it. "The cabdriver never went home . . . Obecny, right?"

Swid nodded his head. "Bobby, it's getting light out."

"Already?"

"Yeah. He's probably jumped bail."

"Where the hell'd he *get* bail? Where's a guy like that come up with five grand in cash, huh?"

"Maybe there was something to that accomplice thing. . . ."

"A woman he said, right? A woman paid him to rape another woman?" Luffrono ran his hand through his hair. He moved the phone index bar to "F." It opened to the "F" page. He shut the top, moved the bar back to "G" and pressed it again. "H" came up again. The page with Steven Hollender's name on it. But he'd already talked to Hollender. He'd even had a squad car stop by to check the guy out. Nothing. No way.

"Jimmy, come here. Look at this. There's no "G" page . . . " The phone rang. Luffrono picked it up. "Elio? What've you got for me?"

"I got two pick-ups at the Bridge Towers: 1900 Park and 17 River Street."

"17 River Street?" Luffrono signaled to Swid who smoothed out the map again. "Thanks, Elio."

"That's right there!" Swid said, pointing across the river. "Holy Christ, you can almost see it!"

"Jimmy, is the name Glassen familiar to you? Glassen . . ."

"Something about it, yeah. I don't know . . . Boats, ships, something . . . Whoa! She's the friend, isn't she? The one you said showed up while you and Lavaco were questioning the girl that first time. . . ."

Luffrono already had his overcoat on. "Glassen . . . Andrea Glassen," he was muttering. "What a jerk!"

They were in the car heading for the bridge. Luffrono had phoned in to headquarters. "Okay," he said, hooking the mike back up. "We'll have plenty of company when we get there. How long has it been, Jimmy? How many hours do you think?"

"Hey, come on, Bobby. You look green, you know?

What's the matter? You were right. We're going to nail her. Why the hell you looking like that?"

"Like what?"

"Like you're going to a funeral or something. . . ."

Luffrono didn't respond. He didn't have to. Swid glanced at him and mumbled a quick apology. "Asshole I am . . . Hang in, Bobby. We'll make it, pal. We're the good guys, remember? We'll make it . . ."

When had Andrea turned off the shower? Emily was trying to remember. She felt stiff and cold. A minute ago, she'd been perspiring. Now she felt cold, and grimey. How ridiculous to be thinking about a hot shower now. She leaned back against the brick wall and hugged herself and watched Andrea pacing.

"The way you looked at him, the way you closed your eyes when he touched you. If you'd look at me . . . really look at me, you'd see that I have so much I want to give you. I'm the one who loves you!"

"It's getting light," Emily said.

Andrea's voice softened again. "It's morning. We've spent the night together. . . ."

Emily turned and peered out of the huge loft window. She didn't want Andrea to see her reaction. She tried hard to suppress the shiver of repulsion that shook her body.

"Are you cold?"

Yes, she wanted to say. It would be the best way to explain the uncontrollable shiver, and it was true. But she could hear it in Andrea's voice; she could hear the cloying concern, the terrible tenderness . . . If Andrea thought she was cold, she would try to embrace her again.

"No," Emily said.

Andrea came closer anyway. She started to slowly put her arms around Emily.

"Please . . . don't."

Andrea stopped. "What's wrong with you? What are you afraid of? I'm not going to hurt you!"

"P-p-p-please . . ."

Andrea cocked her head and smiled strangely. "I could have hurt you, but I didn't. I kept it from happening." She started toward Emily again. This time, Emily darted away. "Why are you running?" Andrea demanded. "You said you could love me. You said it! *Stand still!*"

But Emily continued to evade her.

"He could have killed you! I wouldn't let him."

Emily's eyes widened in terror. She thought she knew what Andrea meant . . . But it couldn't be . . . She was tired. Her body, her brain, were exhausted. Andrea had to be talking about the day she'd slammed Obecny's hand in the door, frightened him away . . . But, intuitively, Emily knew that was not what she'd meant. It was the other time. It was . . .

Andrea threw one of the pillows off the bed. The miniature tape recorder and the switchblade knife were there. "Yes . . . him, him, in your apartment!"

"Oh, G-g-g-od . . . !"

"I told him what to do. Exactly. Did he hurt you?"

Emily's eyes were riveted to the objects on the bed. "Y-y-yes."

Softly, tightly, Andrea said, "No. *I wouldn't let him.*" She sat down on the bed and stretched herself toward Emily. "Say you can love me!"

Emily continued to stare at the tape recorder and the knife. She held her stomach suddenly. She shook her head. No. She couldn't speak. She couldn't get the single, simple word out. But her body, the shaking of her head, the nausea, the dizziness—they said it, clearly. *No.* No, she could not love Andrea. No, she could not even pretend. No, not even if her life depended on it. *No!*

Andrea snapped. She rolled over and picked up the

knife. Her melting eyes turned hard and clear again. "You *liedl*" The shriek echoed through the empty loft. For a second, a split second, Emily thought that Andrea had stabbed herself—the sound was that agonized, that filled with unendurable pain. But Andrea rolled again, rolled herself to the edge of the bed and stood, crouched really, crouched there, trembling. The knife was in her hand. The knife was unopened.

Emily tried once more to speak. Her mouth moved, her lips tried to form the words, any words, words like Don't, Please, Stop, Wait . . . There were no words. There was only a profound silence in which the sudden click of the switchblade's release gusted like the wind.

Andrea moved toward her. Summoning all her strength, Emily ran past Andrea, shoving her, knocking her off balance. She raced away, as far away as she could get. And suddenly she was up against the big loft window. Andrea was coming toward her. There was nowhere to run, nowhere. There was the window behind her and Andrea before her, and the knife blade gleaming with the red blood of dawn.

Emily's mouth opened wide. Her tongue seemed glued to the roof of her mouth. Every muscle in her face felt the strain of the scream that would not come. "AHHHHHHhhhhh . . . Ahahahah . . ."

Andrea stopped suddenly. Her eyes glistened with anger and excitement. She poked the knife out in front of her. "Say ahhh . . . "

Emily stared. Terror and disbelief enveloped her.

"Ahhhhh, AHHHHHHH . . . " Andrea said. Her voice was Emily's. "You move—I cut. Uh . . . say ahhh. *Say ahhh* . . ."

She stared at Andrea as the terrible recitation continued. She listened, transfixed, sick with terror and confusion, as she heard both her own halting, stuttering voice and an imitation of Obecny's that changed to the

mesmerizing deep tones of Andrea's true voice, all coming from the trembling woman who stood swaying toward her. "You yell . . . the knife goes down your t'roat. Unnerstand? I wanna hear it . . . Y-y-yes . . . I-I understand . . . p-p-please . . . "

Emily began to cry. "P-p-p-pl . . . "

"What you got on?" Andrea shouted. "Top and bottom? *What?* . . . B-b-bra and p-pp-pann-nties . . ." She was hypnotically weaving back and forth, the knife in her hand moved like a wand. "Show it . . . lift the sweater . . . *C'mon!*" It was Obecny's voice. Then, in an instant, it was Andrea's voice again and she stopped her swaying to stand deadly still. "Speak up, I can't hear you!"

Suddenly Emily understood. Andrea was lost. Torn between two fierce forces, two inner voices, she had become the sadist and the victim. Her body was no longer swaying, it was her mind now . . . swaying between tormentor and tormented.

Andrea was lost. The compulsion to remain in command, in total control, had turned her into the mindless sadist, Obecny. The desire to rest, to surrender, to be taken care of, had turned her into Emily—the old Emily, a terrorized, fragile, stuttering girl who *needed* to be taken care of and who could mistake that need for love.

"I understand," Emily said. Her voice was soft but perfectly clear. It was a strange new voice—a voice quietly assured, filled with all the strength and clarity of the awesome revelation that Andrea Glassen was helpless, harmless, lost. "You got underwear on, huh?" Andrea asked.

"Don't hurt me, please."

"What you got on—top and bottom, what?"

"Please," Emily said quietly.

"Show it, show it. Come on, lift the sweater."

"I can't."

"Sure you can. You better do it. Now, we're gonna look at the good stuff. Pull it down sweetheart. Hey, pull it down."

Emily had not moved. There were tears in her eyes and she could feel them flooding onto her cheeks. She did not move, not even to wipe away the tears. "No," she said.

"Now open your mouth—say ahhh. You move, I cut. Say ahhh. Open your mouth. *Do it. Now. Do it!*"

She said nothing. She did nothing.

"Pppplease . . . " Andrea whimpered. Her knife hand lowered. As Emily, she had no knife, she was helpless. But as Obecny, she needed it. Now, she tried to lift the switchblade, to point it at the tearful frightened girl in front of her. She tried. She faltered. "B-b-bra and p-p-p-panties . . ."

"No," Emily said softly.

Andrea trembled. "I-I-I- understand . . . "

"Stop that!"

"Mmmmmy sweater? N-n-no, Oh, p-p-p-please, n-no . . ." The knife hung in her lowered hand. She was helpless, shivering, vulnerable . . . She was Emily now. Emily, the victim.

"*Stop that,* please . . . Andrea, please."

"A . . . a b-b-bra . . . and—"

She got no further. Emily's own trembling hand came up steady and sure. It caught Andrea on the cheek. It slapped her hard, once, across the face. Andrea stared back blankly. She shook her head very slowly. "P-p-p-please, d-d-don't hurt me . . . " she said in Emily's voice. The knife fell out of her limp hand.

"I won't hurt you," Emily promised.

They were sitting together on the bed when Luffrono and Swid broke in. Andrea's head was buried in Emily's neck. Her eyes were closed. She was rocking back and forth as Emily stroked her tangled hair.

Emily helped her up. "It's all right," she said, as Swid put his arm around Andrea.

There were police cars out front. Emily saw the green Chrysler among them. "The last thing I said was stay home. . . . " Luffrono said. They walked past the Chrysler together. "You were lucky. You know that?"

"She never would have hurt me."

"Yes, she would have."

Emily looked up into his face. He was right, she realized. She relaxed against his arm again. "Luffrono, let's walk. I'd like to walk."

He looked at the bridge. "Emily . . . "

"I feel fine! I feel very good."

The sun was coming up. The river was streaked with daylight. The windows of the buildings on the other side of the bridge were shimmering with the fire of dawn.

"This used to be my favorite time of the day," Luffrono said as they approached the bridge together. "Did I ever tell you that?"

Emily shook her head. "No."

"Well it was. I've got a lot to tell you, Emmie." He slowed suddenly.

"What's wrong?"

"I never realized how far it is across," Luffrono said, regarding the expanse before them skeptically.

Emily looked up at him and laughed. "We can make it," she promised.

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